

Invigorating

NEW DELHI

By BEN MACK

There are more people in New Delhi than there are in most countries – but that really isn't so surprising considering it's the capital of the second most-populous nation on Earth. What is surprising is that despite the teeming multitudes, it's quite easy to escape humanity.

Alright, so that might be difficult to do physically. But it isn't hard to find oneself in a higher place spiritually, thanks to the sheer number of temples found, well, everywhere.

New Delhi boasts more temples than most cities do people, but the first one many think of – and the one that would most make visitors feel disappointed if they didn't have a chance to experience it – is Akshardham. And there's a good reason why: it's the largest Hindu temple in the world.

The name meaning 'divine abode of God,' there's an unquestionably otherworldly feel to Akshardham. Although it looks ancient, it was actually only consecrated in 2005. Newness aside, the place is massive. In addition to its jaw-droppingly awesome main hall and expansive

gardens, there are three different exhibitions and a high-tech water show involving lasers, pyrotechnics, actors, projections on the sides of buildings, and more that has to be seen to be believed. There's also several restaurants on site at a surprisingly gourmet food court, so an entire day (or longer) can easily be spent at the impeccably clean complex.

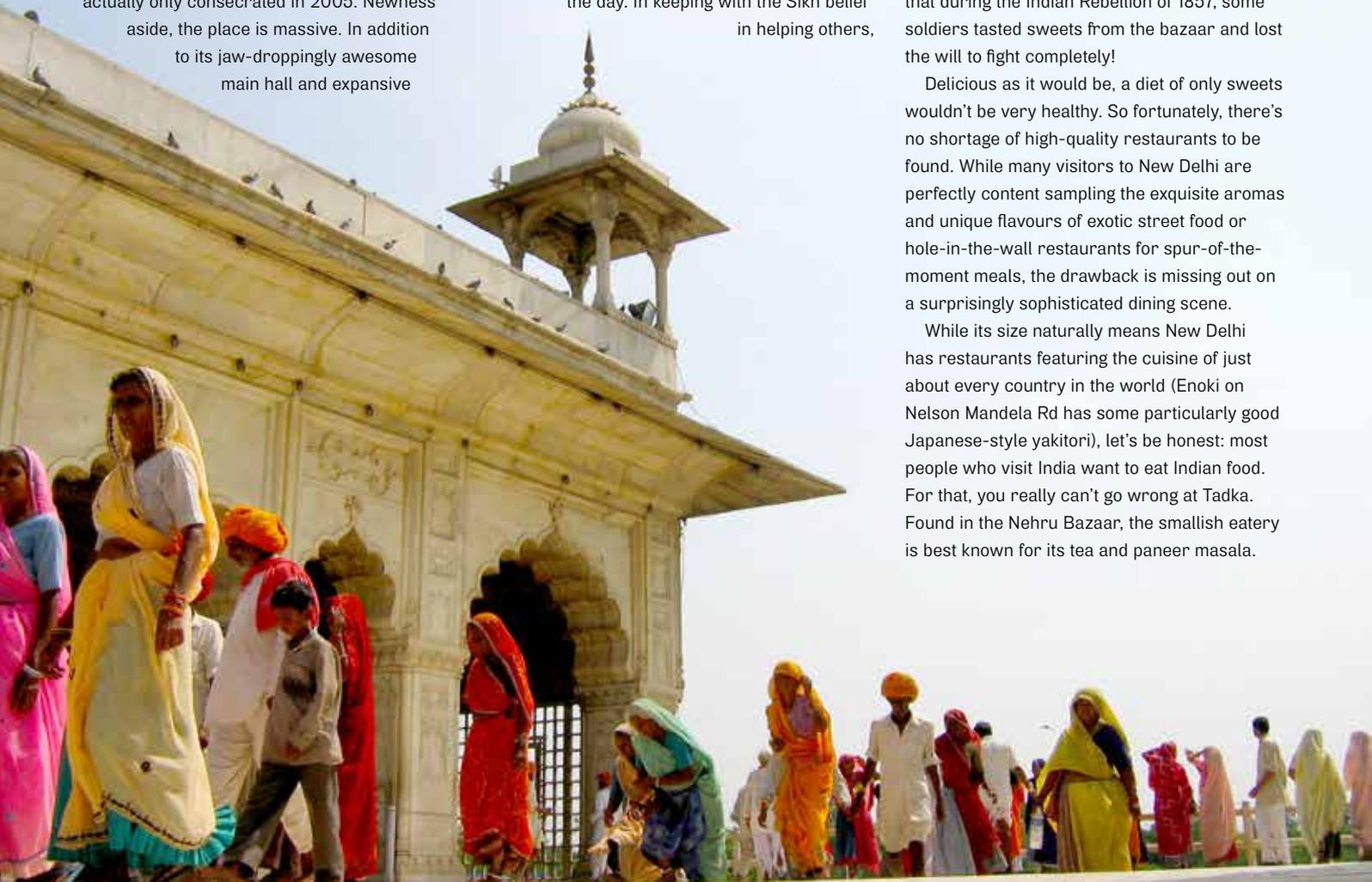
Although smaller, Gurudwara Bangla Sahib is no less stunning. Located near the oldest parts of the city centre, this Sikh gurudwara is considered one of the most important that's not along the Ganges. First built in 1664, the large pond at the centre of the complex is said to have healing powers. There might be something to that, because simply walking around it can melt away even extreme stress and take visitors to a place and time far, far away. Entry to the gurudwara is free and anyone can sit inside the main hall (just don't sit with your feet in front of you, because it's considered extremely rude!) and listen to gurus teach at almost all hours of the day. In keeping with the Sikh belief in helping others,

there's also usually free water to drink and food to be had.

For a different type of spiritual experience, a walk through the bazaars of Old Delhi, as the most historical bits of New Delhi are known, is more than worth navigating the chaotic streets. The most famous of the bazaars is Chandni Chowk. Built around the Red Fort (a can't-miss destination in its own right) in the 17th century, the bazaar – which has featured in more than a few Bollywood films – is one of the largest in Asia. Name the item, no matter how obscure, and chances are there'll be not one or two, but several merchants selling it at a shop somewhere along the labyrinthine alleyways – and for a price that you can haggle down to serious bargain territory. But one of the market's real specialities is its halwai, or sweet shops. It's said that there's more than 1,000 in the Chandni Chowk, and you really can't go wrong with any of them, as each one has its own sugary specialties. A popular story goes that during the Indian Rebellion of 1857, some soldiers tasted sweets from the bazaar and lost the will to fight completely!

Delicious as it would be, a diet of only sweets wouldn't be very healthy. So fortunately, there's no shortage of high-quality restaurants to be found. While many visitors to New Delhi are perfectly content sampling the exquisite aromas and unique flavours of exotic street food or hole-in-the-wall restaurants for spur-of-the-moment meals, the drawback is missing out on a surprisingly sophisticated dining scene.

While its size naturally means New Delhi has restaurants featuring the cuisine of just about every country in the world (Enoki on Nelson Mandela Rd has some particularly good Japanese-style yakitori), let's be honest: most people who visit India want to eat Indian food. For that, you really can't go wrong at Tadka. Found in the Nehru Bazaar, the smallish eatery is best known for its tea and paneer masala.





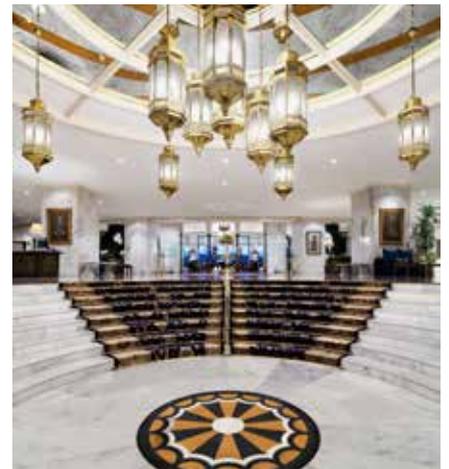
Humayun Tomb, New Delhi - the last refuge of Mughal Emperor Humayan - is one of the most popular tourist destinations in India.



Dum Pukht - The Grand Cuisine of India at Maurya Sheraton



Hall of audience (Diwan-i-Khas), Red Fort, Old Delhi. Photo: LUCIANO MORTULA



Taj Palace Hotel Lobby. Photo: LOUANE RODRIGUES

Although somewhat expensive by the area's standards, a full meal still only usually costs about 150 rupees per person.

To experience New Delhi's cuisine as the Maharajas of old might have, one of the best places to do so is at Bukhara. Found inside the Maurya Sheraton, the restaurant has a reputation as being one of India's highest-rated restaurants. Although the prices are steep (about 2,000 rupees per person), the quality of the food and stunning scenery are top value. The roast lamb and signature Bukhara dhal are legendary. Just be sure to make reservations in advance; otherwise be prepared to stand in a queue that can take up to two hours.

Like its food scene, New Delhi's lodgings vary wildly. From backpackers' hostels that cost just a few rupees per night for a bed in a dorm-style room to the five star Taj Palace and Le Meridien where modern day royalty stays, there's something for every price range. A good middle-of-the-road option is New Delhi Bed and Breakfast. Don't let the plain name fool you. Run by a friendly couple, this cosy guesthouse has a fantastic library with books on culture, city guides and India guidebooks in lounge area. Even better, there's free tea and coffee, and each room has a private bathroom with a Western-style toilet and shower.

There's enough to do both within New

Delhi itself (like the India Gate, Humayun's Tomb or a ride on the Delhi Metro and an auto rickshaw that's not to be passed up) and nearby (Agra and the Taj Mahal is a few hours' five away, and can be done in a long day trip) to keep visitors going non-stop for weeks. But with pretty much everyone else also going non-stop, sometimes it's just nice to sit back and watch them all go by.

Bonus points if you can do it while cooling off with a juice in hand amid postcard-perfect surroundings.

✈️ Fiji Airways flies to Singapore from Nadi on Tuesdays and Saturdays and code shares with Jet Air to Delhi



Akshardham or Swaminarayan Akshardham complex is a Hindu mandir, and a spiritual-cultural campus in New Delhi, India. Photo: MAHARAJ KHAZANCHI



Delhi's Chandni Chowk, the great old market surrounding the Red Fort and the ancient city of Shahjahnabad