

Two unhurried days in Agra: Taj, Fort and the quieter corners

Agra, Uttar Pradesh — City of the Taj

A two-day loop that puts the Taj Mahal at first light, gives the Fort its due with some context, and then slows down for a moonlit garden, a half-day trip to Akbar's abandoned capital, and enough petha and kebabs to bring the trip home in your stomach as much as your camera roll. Built for a family or mixed-age group who want the big monument done right without being rushed through everything else.

Suits: Families and friend groups travelling mid-range who want the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort done properly, plus a taste of Mughal history beyond the postcard sights, at a pace that leaves room for grandparents and small children to rest.

What it costs, per person

Stay: Rs 5,500 · Food: Rs 1,300 · Local transport: Rs 750 · Tickets: Rs 225 · **Total: Rs 7,775**

Day 1 · Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and a moonlight garden

The two big monuments, bookended by an evening on the river

06:00 Taj Mahal at opening time

Arrive right at opening to catch the marble in soft early light and beat both the heat and the worst of the queues. Security checks are strict here: no food, power banks or large bags allowed inside, so carry only water and essentials in a small pouch.

Taj Mahal, East Gate · 150 min · Rs 50 · Short walk or battery-shuttle from hotel/parking near East Gate, about 10 minutes, no private vehicles allowed up to the gate

With family: Queues can be long even at opening in peak season; the battery-shuttle or horse-cart ride to the gate is a small novelty kids enjoy. Uneven marble and sandstone paths, so proper shoes matter for elderly members.

09:30 Agra Fort

A short auto ride from the Taj brings you to this red sandstone fortress-palace, which rewards a guide or audio commentary far more than the Taj does, since the courtyards and halls need context to make sense. Look for the view across the river to the Taj from Musamman Burj.

Agra Fort · 120 min · Rs 40 · Auto-rickshaw, about 15 minutes, approx 60 INR

With family: Long stretches of uneven stone flooring and steps without handrails in places; pace this one with breaks and carry water. Hiring a guide at the entrance (agree on price first) makes it far more engaging for children.

17:00 Mehtab Bagh at sunset

This restored Mughal charbagh garden sits directly across the Yamuna from the Taj and was built for the emperor to view his monument by moonlight; it is the best sunset spot in the city and an easy, flat walk after a heavier sightseeing morning.

Mehtab Bagh, opposite bank of the Yamuna · 60 min · Rs 30 · Auto-rickshaw from hotel, about 15-20 minutes crossing the river, approx 70 INR

With family: Flat, grassy paths, good for kids to run around after a day of monument walking. Best light is about 45 minutes before actual sunset.

18:30 Evening at Sadar Bazaar and Kinari Bazaar

Wind down the day browsing leather goods, marble handicrafts and petha shops, and treat marble-inlay authenticity claims with some scepticism. This is also where dinner happens tonight, at one of the sit-down restaurants just off the main market lane.

Sadar Bazaar / Kinari Bazaar · 90 min · Rs 0 · Auto-rickshaw, about 15 minutes, approx 60 INR

With family: Narrow lanes shared with cycle-rickshaws, autos and the occasional stray cow; keep small children close and hold hands at peak evening hours.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Bedai and aloo sabzi from a local morning stall, or hotel breakfast if starting very early for the Taj — Near hotel / Sadar Bazaar stalls (Rs 100)

Lunch: Vegetarian thali or North Indian sit-down meal at a mid-range restaurant — Restaurant on Fatehabad

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Road (Rs 250)

Dinner: Mughlai kebabs, dum curry and buttery naan, finished off with a few petha flavours to carry home — Restaurant in Sadar Bazaar (Rs 300)

Where to stay

Howard Plaza - The Fern, Fatehabad Road — Rs 2,750 a night. A comfortable mid-range property a short drive from the Taj East Gate, with clean rooms and workable amenities for families travelling with children; price shown is per person assuming two sharing a room.

Save a little: Use pre-paid autos from stands near Sadar Bazaar and agree on a fare before boarding rather than taking a hotel taxi for every short hop; a 15-minute ride should not cost more than 60-80 INR if negotiated upfront.

Day total, per person: Rs 3,820

Day 2 · Fatehpur Sikri, the Baby Taj, and Akbar's tomb

A half-day trip to Akbar's abandoned capital, then the quieter Mughal sights back in Agra

08:00 Fatehpur Sikri

Akbar's abandoned capital, about 40 km from Agra, is a full sandstone city of courts and palaces topped by the towering Buland Darwaza gateway, built and deserted within decades due to water shortages. A full-day hired car is the least stressful way to do this trip with elderly family members, since it also covers today's later stops.

Fatehpur Sikri · 150 min · Rs 50 · Private car hire from hotel, approx 60-70 minutes each way; full-day car hire works out to roughly 400 INR per person if shared across a family of four, and covers all of today's travel

With family: Large courtyards and long walking distances on sandstone, with a steep flight of steps up to Buland Darwaza that has no handrail; pace this one, wear covered shoes, and carry water. A guide at the entrance helps make sense of the layout.

13:30 Itmad-ud-Daulah, the Baby Taj

A smaller marble tomb on the far bank of the Yamuna, built a decade before the Taj Mahal and considered its architectural rehearsal, with delicate marble inlay and far fewer crowds. A good stop for anyone who found the Taj queues overwhelming.

Itmad-ud-Daulah · 60 min · Rs 40 · Same hired car back toward Agra, about 60-70 minutes, no extra fare (covered in day's car hire)

With family: Much less walking than the Fort or Fatehpur Sikri, a relatively easy stop for anyone tired from the morning.

15:30 Akbar's Tomb, Sikandra

Akbar's own mausoleum a few kilometres outside the centre, deliberately blending Hindu, Islamic, Jain and Christian architectural elements. Large, shaded grounds with deer roaming freely make this a relaxed stop for grandparents who want a bench and some greenery rather than another crowded monument.

Sikandra · 75 min · Rs 15 · Same hired car, about 20-25 minutes, no extra fare (covered in day's car hire)

With family: Flat, shaded paths and benches throughout; the easiest stop of the day for anyone with limited mobility.

17:00 Petha shopping at Loi ka Pul

A quick stop to pick up petha in its many flavours to carry home, at the shops around Loi ka Pul that specialise in it, before heading back for dinner.

Loi ka Pul, old city · 45 min · Rs 0 · Same hired car back into the old city, about 20 minutes, no extra fare (covered in day's car hire)

With family: Narrow shopfronts get crowded in the evening; keep the group together and let one or two people do the buying while others wait outside.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Hotel breakfast or bedai-aloo sabzi from a stall before setting out early — Hotel / near Fatehabad Road (Rs 100)

Lunch: Simple thali or North Indian meal at a local eatery near Fatehpur Sikri — Fatehpur Sikri town (Rs 250)

Dinner: Mughlai dinner to close out the trip, kebabs and dum-cooked curries with naan — Restaurant near hotel, Fatehabad Road (Rs 300)

Where to stay

Howard Plaza - The Fern, Fatehabad Road — Rs 2,750 a night. Same property as night one, avoiding the hassle of switching hotels mid-trip; comfortable and close to the day's return route from Fatehpur Sikri.

Save a little: Share a single full-day car hire across the whole family rather than booking separate autos or cabs for Fatehpur Sikri, Itmad-ud-Daulah and Sikandra individually; it works out cheaper per person and removes the stress of renegotiating a fare at every stop.

Day total, per person: Rs 3,955

Pack for this trip

- Comfortable, closed walking shoes for uneven sandstone and marble flooring at the Taj, Fort and Fatehpur Sikri.
- A refillable water bottle; food, power banks and large bags are not allowed inside the Taj Mahal security check.
- Sunscreen, hats and light layers, since even cooler months have strong midday sun for the outdoor walking involved.
- A small day bag rather than a large one, given the security restrictions at monument entrances.
- Check the day of the week before finalising plans: the Taj Mahal is closed on Fridays, so shift the itinerary if your visit falls then.

Stay safe

- Touts, unofficial guides and commission-seeking drivers are common right outside monument gates; agree on prices before accepting any help or service.
- No private vehicles, including autos, are allowed up to the Taj Mahal gates; you will walk the last stretch or take a shuttle or horse-cart, which is normal and safe.
- Old-city roads around Sadar Bazaar and Kinari Bazaar are narrow and shared with rickshaws, autos and stray cattle; keep small children close, especially at peak evening hours.
- Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri both have long uneven stone stretches and unguarded steps in places; pace visits with breaks for elderly family members.
- The Taj Mahal is closed on Fridays; confirm your visit dates don't fall on this day before booking travel.

Local courtesies

- Dress modestly when visiting the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and other monuments, particularly around the mosque areas.
- Bargain firmly but politely with autos, rickshaws and market vendors; an initial quote for tourists is usually double the fair local rate.
- It is fine to ask hotel and mid-range restaurant staff for Jain or pure-vegetarian modifications; they generally understand the request without much explanation.
- Photography is allowed at most monuments but tripods and drones typically need prior permission, so check at the ticket counter if you plan to bring either.

If it rains

- The Taj Mahal and Agra Fort are still visitable in light rain, though marble and sandstone floors get slippery, so slow down and watch your footing.
- Fatehpur Sikri's open courtyards are less pleasant in heavy rain; consider swapping that day's order and doing the Baby Taj and Sikandra first if a downpour is expected in the morning.
- Sadar Bazaar's covered shop lanes make for a reasonable rainy-evening alternative to an outdoor sunset at Mehtab Bagh.
- Carry a compact umbrella or light raincoat rather than a large one, since bags are checked and restricted at monument entrances.