



DELHI NCR · INDIA

Delhi Before Maps

A field-tested playbook for navigating India's capital: 8 ancient cities, Mughal alleys, Sufi evenings, culinary institutions, and the world-class Metro system.

How to Actually Love Delhi

Most foreign visitors treat Delhi merely as an unavoidable transit hub - landing at IGI airport, getting overwhelmed by touts at New Delhi Railway Station, catching a glimpse of India Gate through smog, and rushing away on the first train to Agra or Jaipur.

This is a tragedy. Delhi is not one city; it is a layered palimpsest of eight historical empires spanning a thousand years. It holds the finest Mughal garden tombs on earth, medieval baolis (stepwells) hidden behind modern apartment blocks, Sufi shrines resonant with 700-year-old qawwali traditions, and one of the cleanest, safest, most efficient air-conditioned metro networks on the planet.

This guide was written to give you the confidence to experience Delhi like an insider: where to base yourself, how to move effortlessly underground, where to taste legendary kebabs and chaat with zero stomach worries, and how to discover ancient ruins where you are the only person walking the stone pathways.

- Uddip, Lead Scout & Founder

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SECTION 01

The 8 Historic Cities & Neighborhood Map

Making Sense of a Mega-City of 30 Million

To understand Delhi, discard the idea of a single city center. The National Capital Region is a vast patchwork of distinct eras: Old Delhi (Shahjahanabad, 17th Century Mughal capital), Lutyens' Delhi (British colonial grand boulevards and government palaces), South Delhi (leafy upscale residential colonies, medieval tombs, and chic cafe quarters), and the modern tech/business towers of Gurgaon and Noida.

For independent travellers, 90% of your time should be spent navigating two primary corridors: the historic Old Delhi spine on the Yellow Metro Line, and the leafy cultural haven of South Delhi (Hauz Khas, Lodhi Colony, Mehrauli, Greater Kailash).

THE GOLDEN WEATHER WINDOW

The ideal time to explore Delhi is November to March. Days are bright, sunny, and crisp (15–24°C), perfect for heritage walks and garden picnics. Avoid May–June (scorching 42–46°C heatwaves) and be prepared for dense winter fog in late December to mid-January.



Humayun's Tomb - the 16th-century Mughal precursor to the Taj Mahal at golden hour.

The Key Neighborhoods Defined

Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi / Chandni Chowk) ↗

MUGHAL HEART

📍 [North-Central \(Yellow Line Metro\)](#) ⌚ Active 8 AM to 10 PM (Markets closed Sundays)

High sensory density: Jama Masjid, the Red Fort, spice bazaars (Khari Baoli), street food lanes (Paranthe Wali Gali), and historic havelis.

Lodhi Art District & Khan Market ↗

ART & HIGH STREET

📍 [Central South Delhi](#) ⌚ 10 AM to 11 PM

India's first open-air public art district with massive street murals, adjacent to the historic Lodhi Gardens and the upscale bookstore/cafe lanes of Khan Market.

Hauz Khas Village & Deer Park ↗

BOHO & 14TH CENTURY RUINS

📍 [South Delhi \(Magenta / Yellow Line\)](#) ⌚ Ruins open sunrise to sunset; cafes late

A 14th-century madrasa and lake complex surrounded by design boutiques, rooftop lounges, and the green forest trails of Deer Park.

Mehrauli & Qutub Complex ↗

OLDEST DELHI (12TH CENTURY)

📍 [Deep South Delhi \(Yellow Line\)](#) ⌚ Sunrise to Sunset

The earliest Islamic sultanate capital. Home to the towering Qutub Minar, Mehrauli Archaeological Park, and Jamali Kamali mosque amidst wilderness.

SECTION 02

Where to Base Yourself

Why You Should Avoid Paharganj and Stay in South Delhi

Old guidebooks notoriously recommend Paharganj (the Main Bazaar near New Delhi Railway Station) for budget travellers. In reality, Paharganj is loud, intensely chaotic, plagued by touts, and offers very poor air quality. Basing yourself in South Delhi or Central Delhi transforms your trip into a peaceful, comfortable experience.

FOUNDER'S STAY STRATEGY

Always choose a guesthouse, Airbnb, or boutique hotel in a gated South Delhi residential colony (such as Defence Colony, Nizamuddin East, Green Park, or Greater Kailash 1). These neighborhoods have tree-lined parks, private security, silent nights, great local markets, and are within 5–10 minutes of a Metro station.

Curated Basecamp Recommendations

The Rose Bed & Breakfast ↗

BOUTIQUE CREATIVE

📍 [Hauz Khas Village](#) 🏠 ₹4,500 - ₹7,000/night

A serene 12-room minimalist retreat overlooking a rose garden right on the edge of Hauz Khas ruins and Deer Park. French cafe on-site.

Bungalow 99 / South Delhi Airbnbs ↗

HERITAGE RESIDENTIAL

📍 [Defence Colony / Nizamuddin East](#) 🏠 ₹3,500 - ₹6,500/night

Private apartments and upscale heritage homes in quiet, leafy residential enclaves with rapid metro connectivity to all monuments.

The Imperial New Delhi ↗

LUXURY ART DECO

📍 [Janpath / Connaught Place](#) 🏠 ₹18,000+/night

Historic 1930s hotel featuring museum-grade colonial art collections, palm-shaded courtyards, and exceptional fine dining.

SECTION 03

What to Actually Do: Essential & Overlooked

The Timeless Masterpieces and Undiscovered Ruins

Delhi's greatest treasures are not its commercial shopping malls, but its vast UNESCO World Heritage monuments, tranquil Sufi dargahs, and 1,000-year-old archaeological parks.



The grand courtyard and red sandstone minarets of Jama Masjid in Old Delhi



The 12th-century Qutub Minar complex in Mehrauli

The Essential Monument List

Humayun's Tomb & Sunder Nursery ↗

UNESCO MASTERPIECE

📍 [Nizamuddin East](#) ⌚ 6:00 AM – 6:00 PM (Go at 7:00 AM for empty gardens)

The 1570 red sandstone mausoleum that inspired the Taj Mahal. Walk directly across into Sunder Nursery – a restored 90-acre Mughal heritage park with 15 restored monuments, marble fountains, and weekend farmers markets.

Qutub Minar & Mehrauli Archaeological Park ↗

12TH CENTURY SULTANATE

📍 [Mehrauli \(Yellow Line Metro\)](#) ⌚ Sunrise to Sunset

The world's tallest brick minaret (72.5m) and the 1,500-year-old rust-resistant Iron Pillar. Walk into the adjacent Mehrauli park to explore the stepwell Rajon ki Baoli and Jamali Kamali tomb in complete solitude.

Nizamuddin Dargah (Thursday Qawwali) ↗

LIVING SUFI TRADITION

📍 [Nizamuddin Basti](#) ⌚ Thursday evenings (6:30 PM & 8:30 PM)

The shrine of 14th-century Sufi saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya and poet Amir Khusrau. Experience transcendent live Sufi music (qawwali) with harmoniums, tabla, and passionate choral chanting in the marble courtyard.

Jama Masjid & Old Delhi Alleys ↗

MUGHAL GRANDEUR

📍 [Chandni Chowk / Chawri Bazar](#) ⌚ 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM & 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM

India's largest historic mosque, built by Emperor Shah Jahan. Climb the southern minaret (130 steps) for an astonishing panoramic view over Old Delhi's labyrinthine rooftops.

SECTION 04

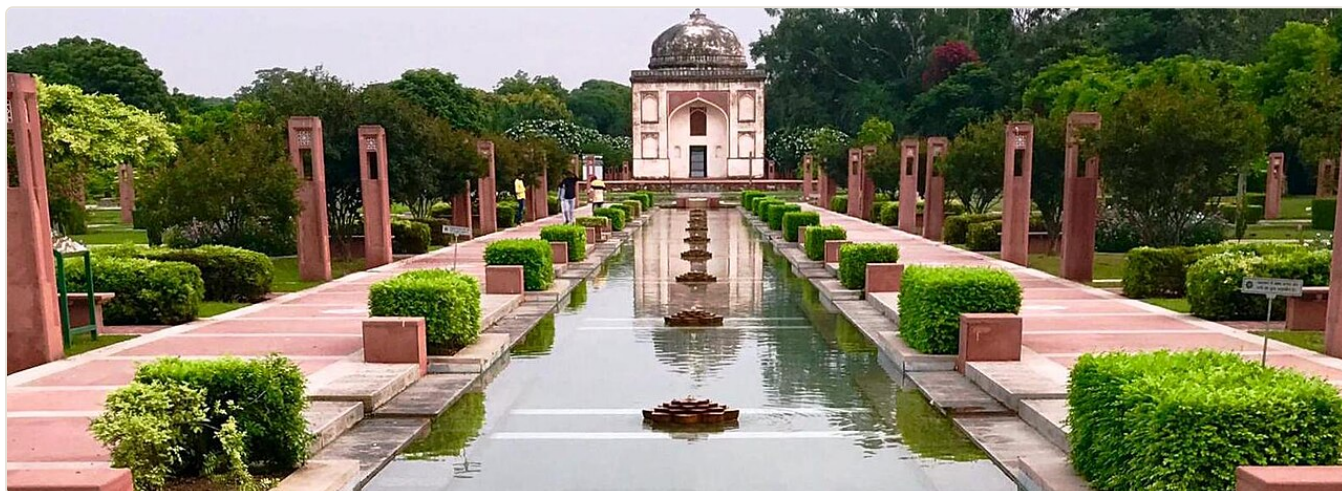
The Culinary Field Guide

Mughlai Feasts, Regional State Bhavans, and Street Food Rules

Delhi is undeniably the food capital of India. The cuisine spans three distinct categories: rich Old Delhi Mughlai heritage (kebabs, biryani, nihari), vibrant Punjabi-Delhi street food (chole bhature, chaat, butter chicken), and authentic regional dining at state government guest houses (State Bhavans).

THE STATE BHAVAN SECRET

For the most authentic, hygienic, and affordable regional food from every corner of India, visit the State Bhavans on Ashoka Road and Chanakypuri (e.g. Andhra Bhavan for unlimited fiery thalis, Kerala House for beef fry and Malabar parotta, and Maharashtra Sadan for coastal fish curry).



Restored Mughal garden pavilions and reflection pools at Sunder Nursery.

Verified Culinary Institutions

Karim's & Al Jawahar ↗

OLD DELHI MUGHLAI

📍 [Gali Kababian, Jama Masjid Gate 1](#) ⌚ 12:00 PM – 11:30 PM 💰 ₹350 – ₹600/person

Legendary 1913 establishment. Mutton Burra kebabs, slow-simmered Nihari, butter-soaked Khamiri rotis, and Shahi Tukda dessert.

Sita Ram Diwan Chand ↗

ICONIC BREAKFAST

📍 [Chuna Mandi, Paharganj](#) ⌚ 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM 💰 ₹100 – ₹150/person

Delhi's most celebrated Chole Bhature since 1970. Spiced paneer-stuffed bhaturas served with tangy raw mango pickle and spiced chickpea curry.

Cafe Lota & National Crafts Museum ↗

CONTEMPORARY REGIONAL

📍 [Pragati Maidan](#) ⌚ 8:00 AM – 9:30 PM 💰 ₹600 – ₹1,000/person

Set inside a shaded open-air village craft museum. Outstanding modern interpretations of regional Indian cuisine: Palak Patta Chaat, Sabudana Vada, and Kumaoni Fish Curry.

SECTION 05

Metro Mastery & Street Navigation

Why the Delhi Metro is Your Greatest Secret Weapon

Delhi's road traffic is notoriously congested during peak hours (8:30–11:00 AM and 5:30–8:30 PM). The Delhi Metro is air-conditioned, spotless, runs every 2 to 4 minutes, and reaches every major monument and market in the city.

Transit Mode	Average Cost	Best Use Case	Scout's Advice
Delhi Metro Smart Card	₹200 (₹50 deposit + ₹150 credit)	All city transit	Buy a Smart Card at Airport T3 station; tap to enter and bypass ticket queues.
Airport Express Metro Line	₹60 one way	Airport T3 ↔ New Delhi Railway Station	Takes exactly 19 minutes; zero traffic risk.
Uber / Ola Auto	₹50 – ₹180 per ride	Last-mile connections from Metro	Book via app to avoid price haggling; specify exact pickup point.
Cycle Rickshaw	₹30 – ₹60	Old Delhi / Chandni Chowk alleyways	Agreed price before sitting; the only vehicle that fits narrow bazaar lanes.

SECTION 06

Field-Tested Itineraries

Step-by-Step 3-Day Delhi Master Blueprint

Follow this sequence to experience Delhi's history chronologically and geographically without spending hours trapped in road traffic.

The 3-Day Delhi Blueprint

Day 1: The Mughal City & Spice Bazaars

07:30 AM

Early morning entry into Jama Masjid before crowds arrive. Climb the minaret for the view.

09:30 AM

Cycle rickshaw ride into Khari Baoli (Asia's largest spice market) and walk the roof terraces.

11:30 AM

Explore the Red Fort complex (Diwan-i-Khas, marble pavilions, and Mughal gardens).

01:30 PM

Feast on Mutton Burra and Khamiri roti at Al Jawahar / Karim's outside Gate 1.

04:30 PM

Afternoon metro ride to Chandni Chowk Haveli Dharampura for heritage tea and Kathak performance.

Day 2: Garden Tombs & Sufi Music

07:30 AM

Walk Humayun's Tomb gardens in morning golden light; photograph the Persian geometric symmetry.

10:00 AM

Walk across into Sunder Nursery for coffee and botanical heritage walks.

01:00 PM

South Indian thali lunch at Andhra Bhavan (Ashoka Road).

03:30 PM

Explore the street murals of Lodhi Art District and walk among 15th-century domes in Lodhi Gardens.

06:30 PM

Attend live Sufi Qawwali at Hazrat Nizamuddin Dargah courtyard.

Day 3: The Ancient Sultanate & Bohemian Alleys

08:30 AM

Explore the Qutub Minar complex and the ancient Iron Pillar of Delhi.

11:00 AM

Walk into Mehrauli Archaeological Park; discover the hidden stepwell Rajon ki Baoli.

01:30 PM

Lunch and specialty coffee overlooking Hauz Khas reservoir at Hauz Khas Village.

04:30 PM

Browse art, design, and independent bookshops (Faqr Chand) in Khan Market.

08:00 PM

Farewell dinner at Indian Accent or a classic South Delhi kebab institution.

SECTION 07

Delhi Street Sense: Scam Defense

Recognizing and Disarming Common Tourist Scams

Delhi's scams are rarely violent, but they can be mentally exhausting if you do not recognize the scripts in advance.

THE 'GOVERNMENT TOURIST OFFICE' SCAM

Near Connaught Place and New Delhi Railway Station, auto drivers or helpful strangers will claim your hotel has burned down, the train is canceled, or the road is blocked by a protest, and offer to take you to the 'Official Delhi Tourism Office' (which is actually a private commission travel agency). Ignore all unsolicited claims. Always proceed directly to your booked destination.

Core Safety & Protocol Rules

Women-Only Metro Coaches ↗

SAFETY

The first coach of every Delhi Metro train in the direction of travel is strictly reserved for women, marked with bright pink platform signs. It is quiet, comfortable, and heavily enforced.

Drinking Water & Street Hygiene ↗

HEALTH

Drink only bottled water with unbroken seal or RO-filtered water. In street food stalls, eat only freshly cooked items steaming directly out of hot oil or tandoors; avoid uncooked cut fruits and roadside tap water.

SIM Card Acquisition ↗

CONNECTIVITY

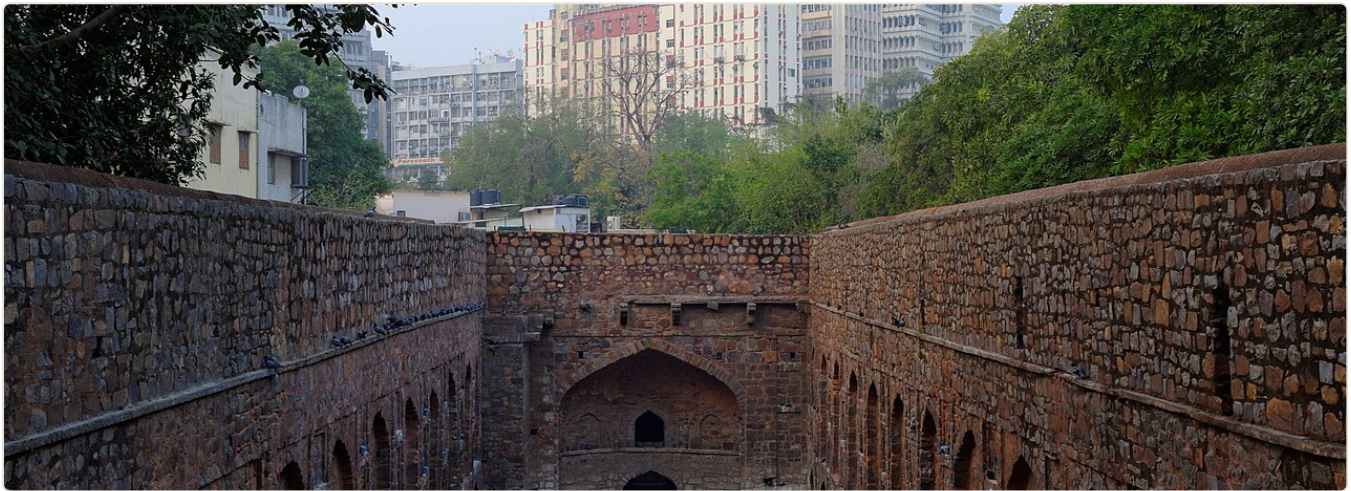
Buy an Airtel or Jio eSIM or physical SIM at the official airport arrivals kiosk (open 24/7) using your passport. Avoid unregistered street roadside vendors.

SECTION 08

Before Maps Secret Spots

Peaceful Sanctuaries Away From the Noise

When Delhi gets loud, these tranquil corners offer green shade, ancient stone architecture, and complete mental space.



Agrasen Ki Baoli - 108 stone steps into medieval quiet in Central Delhi.

Private Scout Pins

Agrasen ki Baoli at 7:30 AM ↗

MEDIEVAL ARCHITECTURE

📍 [Hailey Road, near Connaught Place](#) ⌚ 7:00 AM – 9:00 AM (Before crowds)

A dramatic 14th-century stepwell with 108 stone steps descending into deep earth. Completely silent in the early morning before influencers arrive.

Sanjay Van Forest Trail ↗

WILDERNESS IN THE CITY

📍 [Vasant Kunj / Mehrauli border](#) ⌚ Sunrise to 10:00 AM

A 783-acre protected ridge forest teeming with peacocks, nilgai (blue bulls), and crumbling 12th-century medieval ramparts of Lal Kot.

Faqir Chand & Sons Bookstore ↗

LITERARY HERITAGE

📍 [Khan Market \(Shop 15A\)](#) ⌚ 11:00 AM – 8:30 PM

Operating since 1951. Floor-to-ceiling stacks of Indian literature, history, poetry, and politics with deep founder warmth.

SECTION 09

Emergency Directory & Checklist

Hospitals, Police, and Contact Card

Save these emergency contacts and hospital coordinates into your phone offline.

Emergency Service	Name / Location	Contact Phone	Notes
Premier Hospital	Max Super Speciality Hospital (Saket)	+91 11 2651 5050	Top international-grade emergency & ICU facility.
Central Hospital	Apollo Hospital (Sarita Vihar)	+91 11 2692 5858	Comprehensive trauma & 24/7 pharmacy.
Tourist Police Helpline	Delhi Tourist Police	112 / +91 11 2301 0101	Dedicated officers for tourist harassment & lost items.
Metro Lost & Found	Kashmere Gate Metro Station	+91 11 2341 7910	Efficient lost item recovery office for all Metro lines.

THE NEXT STEP · BEFORE MAPS HOSTED EXPERIENCES

From Self-Guided Manuals to Fully Curated Expeditions

While this field manual gives you the tools to explore independently, Before Maps also designs bespoke private journeys and hosts intimate small-group expeditions across India.

Curated Group Journeys

Small-group expeditions (max 8–10 travellers) led personally by local scouts across Ladakh, Spiti, Kashmir, Rajasthan, and the Western Ghats. All-inclusive, unscripted, deep local immersion.

[Explore Curated Journeys →](#)
Bespoke Private Travel Architecture

End-to-end custom itineraries crafted for high-touch private travel. Zero-commission drivers, hand-picked heritage properties, verified permits, and 24/7 on-ground scout oversight.

[The Signature Standard →](#)
● Direct WhatsApp Scout Companion

Travelling independently with this guide? Get direct 1-on-1 WhatsApp access to Scout Uddip during your trip for live restaurant vetting, taxi union rate sanity checks, weather updates, and emergency routing.

[Chat on WhatsApp →](#)

BEFORE MAPS

"We don't just show you where to go - we show you how to experience it."

Every route in this field manual was scouted personally, walked slowly, and verified on the ground. No sponsored listings. No crowd aggregations. Just unfiltered local intelligence.

CURATED JOURNEYS

beforemaps.com/journeys

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