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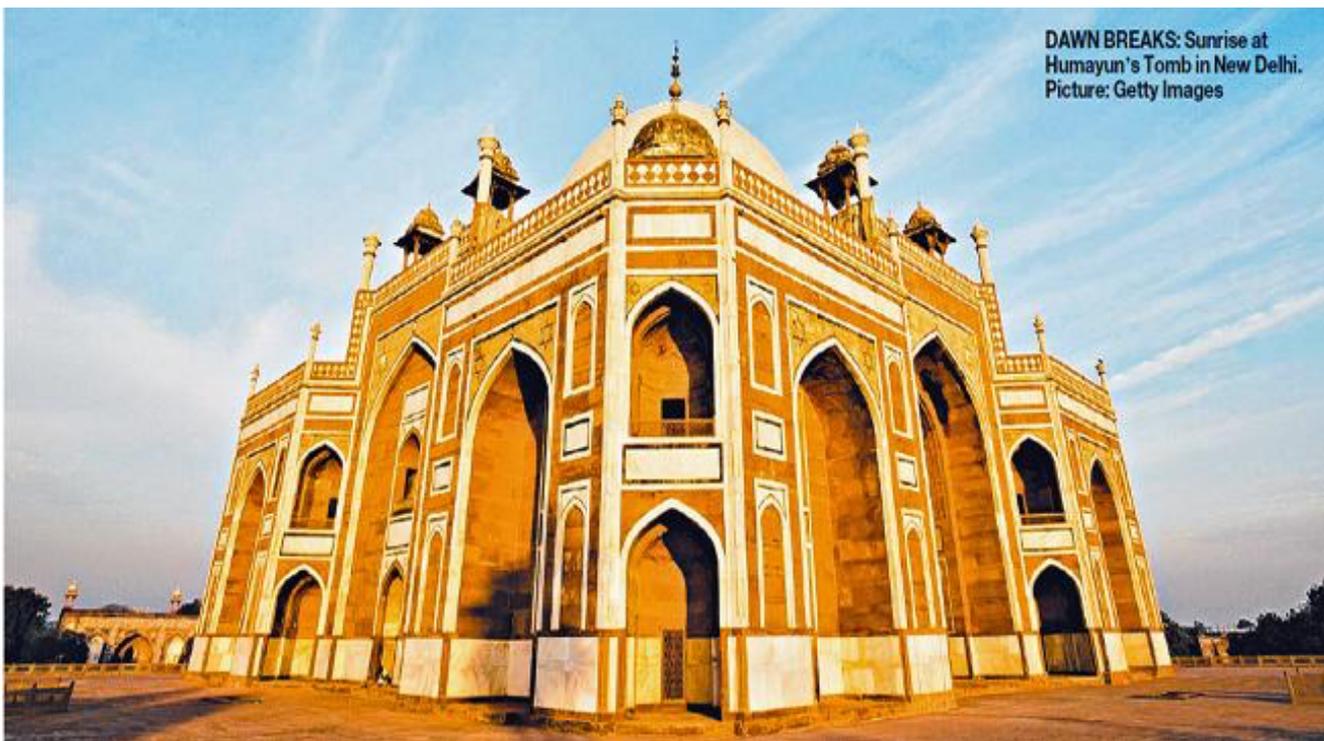
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Travel Advice

New Delhi's tale of two cities

- Anthony Dennis
- From: *escape*
- September 22, 2010 2:03PM

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Source: Supplied



Be sure to visit the Golden Temple. Picture: AFP Source: AFP

DELHI may be guilty of dilly-dallying on preparations for next month's Commonwealth Games and construction of some venues is running seriously late. But the good news for visitors (the vast majority of whom won't come during the Games anyway) is that the rest of Delhi is completely finished, and has been for, well, centuries.

The capital of India has emerged as a mega-metropolis, divided in two between New Delhi, the manicured planned capital of India, and Old Delhi, the chaotic heart of the city.

One piece of Games-related infrastructure that will benefit visitors for years to come is the Indira Gandhi International Airport, which has the latest facilities. But whenever you go, as you must, you'll need this Delhi "to do" list.

Do: Be taken for a ride

Delhi is one Indian city blessed with excellent public transport. As well as the new Metro system (www.delhimetrorail.com), which will soon extend to the new airport, you must take a trip in one of the marvellously anachronistic old black-and-yellow Ambassador taxis. They're made by Hindustan Motors and the body shape has not changed since 1958. And don't miss a leisurely, though fascinating, rickshaw ride along Chandni Chowk, Old Delhi's main street, and through the narrow, souklike laneways of Old Delhi.

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Do: Take a walk in the park

New Delhi, like Canberra, is a planned city and was designed by the British in the 1930s. As a result, it is replete with parks. One of the best is Lodi Gardens, which is full of centuries-old monuments, all with free entry. Early morning is the best time to visit. Keep an eye out in the park for the yoga enthusiasts and participants in laughter therapy clubs. Beyond the centre is the Mehrauli Archaeological Park, which is full of ruins from the 12th and 13th-century Islamic rule, including the Quib Minar. Everywhere the antiquities are interspersed with impromptu cricket games played by Delhi locals.

Do: Visit a monument

Delhi is an ancient city and there's an endless list of temples, tombs and monuments to visit. Humayun's Tomb, the resting place of the second Mughal emperor, is believed to have influenced the design of the Taj Mahal. Convenient to visit while you're in Old Delhi is the sprawling Red Fort, commissioned in 1639 by Shah Jahan as his residence. Its ramparts, which dominate Old Delhi, extend for 2km. In New Delhi, India Gate, a sandstone arch built to commemorate British and Indian soldiers of World War I, is a colourful, convivial place to wander around, especially at weekends when it is frequented by families and ice-cream carts.

Do: Be guided

Delhi Heritage Walks (delhiheritagewalks.com), offers a series of specialised and, if you wish, customised, walks around the city. The guides are local scholars who speak perfect English and know their city intimately. The walks include tours of the bazaar area, Chandni Chowk, and the lanes of Old Delhi, Lodi Gardens, Mehrauli Archaeological Park and Jama Masjid, India's biggest mosque. Being guided by a friendly, trustworthy and knowledgeable local makes Delhi less intimidating.

Do: Take a day trip

Delhi has long been popular as a base for day excursions to the must-see Taj Mahal in the city of Agra, though do consider staying overnight to beat the crowds by viewing India's most popular attraction in the cool and calm of dawn. If you do elect for a day trip, leave early from New Delhi Station. The train trip can take two to four hours. Consider splurging on a day-use room at a hotel, such as the comfortable and affordable Gateway Hotel (www.thegatewayhotels.com), so you can relax and freshen up for the return journey in the evening.

Do: Dine out

Many of Delhi's best restaurants are in leading hotels, such as those of the Taj Hotels group (tajhotels.com), The Imperial (theimperialindia.com) and the Park New Delhi (theparkhotels.com). Fire, at the contemporary Park Hotel, designed by Terence Conran's firm, is the perfect place to experience modern Indian cuisine. Equally modern is Varq, inside the stately Taj Mahal Hotel, which is also a great location for a drink or afternoon tea. Take lunch at the posh Imperial, a landmark in its own right dating to the 1930s that oozes British Raj nostalgia. At the hotel's 1911 Restaurant (named in honour of the year the British declared New Delhi the capital of India), snare a table in the sunny veranda section overlooking the hotel's lawns.

Do: Go shopping

Delhi is a delight for silk souvenirs, jewellery and homewares. Aside from the multitude of markets in Old Delhi, such as the Chandni Chowk bazaar, one of the best shopping destinations is Connaught Square, which opened in 1931 and has been the subject of a much-needed makeover for the Commonwealth Games.

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The author was a guest of Taj Hotels and Singapore Airlines.

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