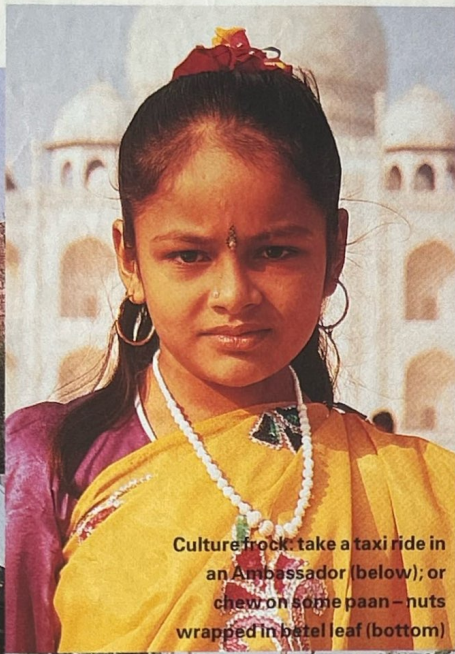
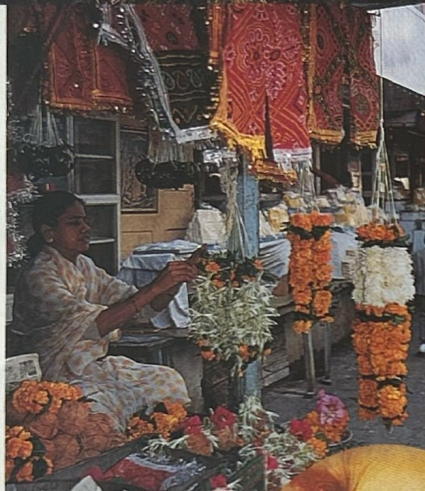


All the Raj: the Old Fort, New Delhi; For me? You shouldn't have (below)



Culture frock: take a taxi ride in an Ambassador (below); or chew on some paan – nuts wrapped in betel leaf (bottom)

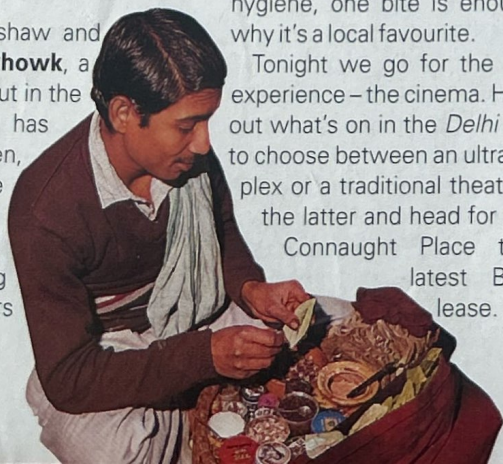


the boutiques offer glamorous creations by India's up-and-coming Armanis – exclusive, chic and very expensive. **Ogaan** (H2 Hauz Khaus Village) is the best shop – where we indulge in a leisurely browse, followed by a stroll in the **Lodi Gardens** among the beautiful tombs and joggers.

The destination for the evening's entertainment is the imposing **Red Fort**, or Lal Qila (off Chatta Chowk). Here a dramatic sound and light show (£4) blares out of crackling speakers from the inner courtyard. After that spectacle we're ready for a regal meal at **Dum Pukhut** (Maurya Sheraton Hotel, Sardar Patel Marg). Kakori kebab, melt-in-the-mouth spiced lamb, and an amazing mutton curry redefine Indian cuisine for £20 a head.

Saturday

We hail a pedal rickshaw and cross into **Chandni Chowk**, a mass of bazaars laid out in the 1700s. Not much has changed since then, except perhaps for the lurid posters advertising sex clinics, and we get happily lost among pavement ear cleaners



and persuasive pedlars before moving on to Delhi's answer to Pronuptia – a whole area of the market dedicated to wedding outfits and paraphernalia. Another five-minute rickshaw ride abandons us to the oriental bedlam of the spice markets where we stock up on fresh turmeric and coriander before getting completely lost. We are finally directed to **Paratha Walla Gully** (an alley full of bakeries) and feast on paratha bread sprinkled with cumin seeds (half a pence each), baked in an incongruously filthy setting. There's still time for a quick look at **Jami Masjid**, India's largest mosque and a stop at **Raj Ghat**, Gandhi's pyre, where people gather every Friday to spin cotton in his memory.

Rumbling stomachs make **Karim's** (Nizamuddin, New Delhi) an essential stop for delicious lamb kebabs and wafer-thin roti bread (£5). Although not high on hygiene, one bite is enough to explain why it's a local favourite.

Tonight we go for the ultimate Hindi experience – the cinema. Having checked out what's on in the *Delhi Diary* we have to choose between an ultra-modern complex or a traditional theatre. We opt for the latter and head for the **Odeon** on Connaught Place to catch the latest Bollywood release. Fully satisfied

by the drama both on and off screen, we head for ice cream and pizza at **Nirula's** (135 L-Block Connaught Circus, £5.)

Sunday

Fighting to stay awake – it's 6am – we board the luxurious **Shatabdi Express** and chug out of Delhi's smog with the sunrise, bound for Agra. The journey costs £20 return and includes breakfast. After the two-hour ride we hire a taxi for the day (£15) and make for the **Taj Mahal**. It is awe inspiring, especially when seen with a rainbow of dazzling saris flowing in front. The Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal as a testament to everlasting love and as a mausoleum for his wife, who died giving birth to their 14th child. We sit in wonderment in the gardens before moving on to Agra's **Red Fort**. The huge fort is a village in itself with harems and perfume pools straight out of *A Thousand and One Nights*. Shah Jahan was imprisoned here by his son, who was thoughtful enough to sequester his father in a room with a view of the Taj Mahal. We end the day much like the Shah would have ended his; watching the sunset transform the marble dome into an iridescent pearl. A finale worthy of any Hindi film director.

Where to stay

- Maurya Sheraton** Sardar Patel Marg, tel (00 91 11) 611 2233. Luxury and the best food in town. Doubles from around £250.
- The Imperial Hotel** Janpath, tel (00 91 11) 334 1234. Colonial charm. Doubles from around £127.
- Jukaso Inn** 50 Sunder Nagar, tel (00 91 11) 469 0309. Cheap, comfortable and clean guest house. Deluxe doubles with breakfast from around £44.

TRAVEL OFFER



Kuoni is offering ELLE readers an exclusive price of £699 per person, for a seven-night Kuoni Taj Tour, with three nights in Agra, two in Delhi and two in Jaipur. The price includes return flights from London Gatwick, half-board accommodation, some sightseeing and a sound and light show at the Red Fort in Delhi. The offer is open, subject to availability, from March 3 to April 21 1998. For reservations, tel Kuoni on (01306) 740500.

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