

Purana Qila 3

Mathura Rd. **Map** 6 D2. **Tel** (011) 2435 4260. ☉ *sunrise–sunset daily*. **Museum Tel** (011) 2435 5387. ☐ 10am–5pm. 🗓 *Friday*. 🚗

Purana Qila, literally “old fort”, stands on an ancient mound. Excavations near its eastern wall reveal that the site has been continuously occupied since 1000 BC. It is also believed to be the place where Indraprastha, the Pandava capital mentioned in the epic, the *Mababbarata* (see p141), once stood.

It was here that Humayun, the second Mughal emperor, began to construct his city, Dinpanah (“Asylum of Faith”), just four years after his father Babur established the Mughal dynasty in 152 (see pp52–3). However, his reign was short-lived and, in 1540, he was dispossessed of his kingdom by the ambitious Afghan chieftain, Sher Shah Sur (r.1540–45). When Sher Shah took possession of the citadel, he strengthened its fortifications, added several new structures and renamed it Shergarh. After his death, his successors were defeated by Humayun who recaptured his domains in 1555. Today, of the many palaces, barracks and houses that once existed, only Sher Shah’s mosque and the building said to be Humayun’s library remain.

The Yamuna once flowed on the fort’s eastern side and formed a natural moat: a small lake to the west facing busy Mathura Road is all that remains today. The present entrance, an imposing red



Boating outside Purana Qila

sandstone gate on the western wall called the **Bara Darwaza**, is one of the three principal gates of Shergarh. Its double-storeyed façade, surmounted by *chhatris* and approached by a steep ramp, still displays traces of tiles and carved foliage.

Humayun’s Gate, on the southern wall, has an inscription bearing Sher Shah’s name and the date 950 AH (1543–4). To the north, the **Taliqi Darwaza** (the so-called “forbidden gate”) has carved reliefs, and across the road is the red sandstone **Lal Darwaza**, or Sher Shah Gate, one of the entrances to the township that grew around the fort.

The single-domed **Qila-i-Kuhna Mosque**, built by Sher Shah in 1541, is an excellent example of a pre-Mughal

design. Its prayer hall inside has five elegant arched niches or *mibrabs* set in its western wall. Marble in shades of red, white and slate is used for the calligraphic inscriptions and marks a transition from Lodi to Mughal architecture. A second storey provided space for female courtiers to pray, while the arched doorway on the left wall, framed by ornate *jharokhas*, was reserved for members of the royal family.

The **Sher Mandal** stands to the south of the mosque. This double-storeyed octagonal tower of red sandstone was built by Sher Shah and was used as a library by Humayun after he recaptured the fort.

The tower is topped by an octagonal *chhatri*,

supported by eight pillars and decorated with white marble.

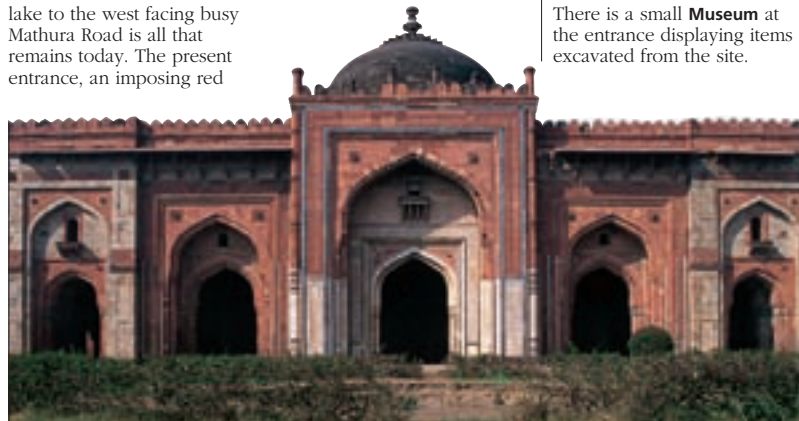
Inside, there are remnants of the decorative plasterwork and traces of the stone shelving where, presumably, the emperor’s books were placed. This was also the tragic spot where, on 24 January 1556, on hearing the

muezzin’s call, the devout Humayun hurried to kneel on the stairs, missed his footing and tumbled to his death. His tomb can be seen from the southern gate. Purana Qila flourished as the sixth city of Delhi (see p107) and traces of walls still stand in the area.

There is a small **Museum** at the entrance displaying items excavated from the site.



Chhatri with decorative tilework



Sher Shah’s mosque at Purana Qila



The single dome surmounting the prayer hall at Khair-ul-Manazil

Khair-ul-Manazil 4

Mathura Rd. **Map** 5 C2. ☉ *sunrise–sunset*.

This mosque, “the most auspicious of houses”, was constructed in 1561 by Akbar’s influential wet nurse, Maham Anga, and a courtier, Shiha-bu’d-Din Ahmed Khan. An imposing, double-storeyed red sandstone gateway leads into a large courtyard ringed by cloisters, two storeys high, one of which was used as a *madrasa*. The prayer hall with its five-arched openings is topped by a single dome. Above the central archway, a marble inscription mentions Maham Anga’s and Shiha-bu’d-Din’s names. Inside, the central *mibrab* is decorated with bands of blue and green calligraphy. Maham Anga is buried in Mehrauli with her son, Adham Khan (see p113), who was killed by Akbar.

Crafts Museum 5

See pp86–7.

Pragati Maidan 6

Mathura Rd. **Map** 6 D1. **Tel** (011) 2337 1540. **Fax** (011) 2337 1492/3. ☐ 10am–5pm daily. 🗓 📺 📶 📞 📠

Hamsadhwani, Falaknuma and Shakuntalam Tel (011) 2337 1849. **National Science Centre Tel** (011) 2337 1893. ☐ 10am–5pm daily. 🚗

India’s largest exhibition centre, covering nearly 150 acres (61 ha), Pragati Maidan is the venue for numerous

buildings are those by Charles Correa, Achyut Kanvinde and Satish Grover. All the Indian states have pavilions spread across the fair’s extensive grounds, linked by 16 km (10 miles) of roads.

Exhibitions are held here throughout the year and cover a range of products from textiles, jewellery, automobiles to mining equipment and food products. Every two years the World Book Fair and the India International Travel and Tourism Show are held, drawing international delegates. Within the grounds are Appu Ghar, a children’s amusement park, and the **National Science Centre** (see p273). Two theatres, the **Falaknuma** and **Shakuntalam**, screen a cross-section of Indian and foreign films, while the **Hamsadhwani Auditorium** is the venue for various cultural events.



A view of Pragati Maidan from Purana Qila

MATKA PIR

Rows of *matkas* (earthenware pots) line the entrance to the shrine of Matka Pir, a Sufi saint. According to legend, a man and his wife came to the saint to seek his help for the birth of a son. Being poor, they could only offer a humble pot of dal and jaggery. The saint asked them to place the pot in the courtyard and leave the rest to God. A year later, their wish fulfilled, they returned with another pot, a tradition that has continued since then. The pot motif leads all the way up the wide marble stairs to the *dargah*, standing on a ridge overlooking Mathura Road. The saint’s powers still attract many pilgrims.



The shrine of the Sufi saint, Matka Pir