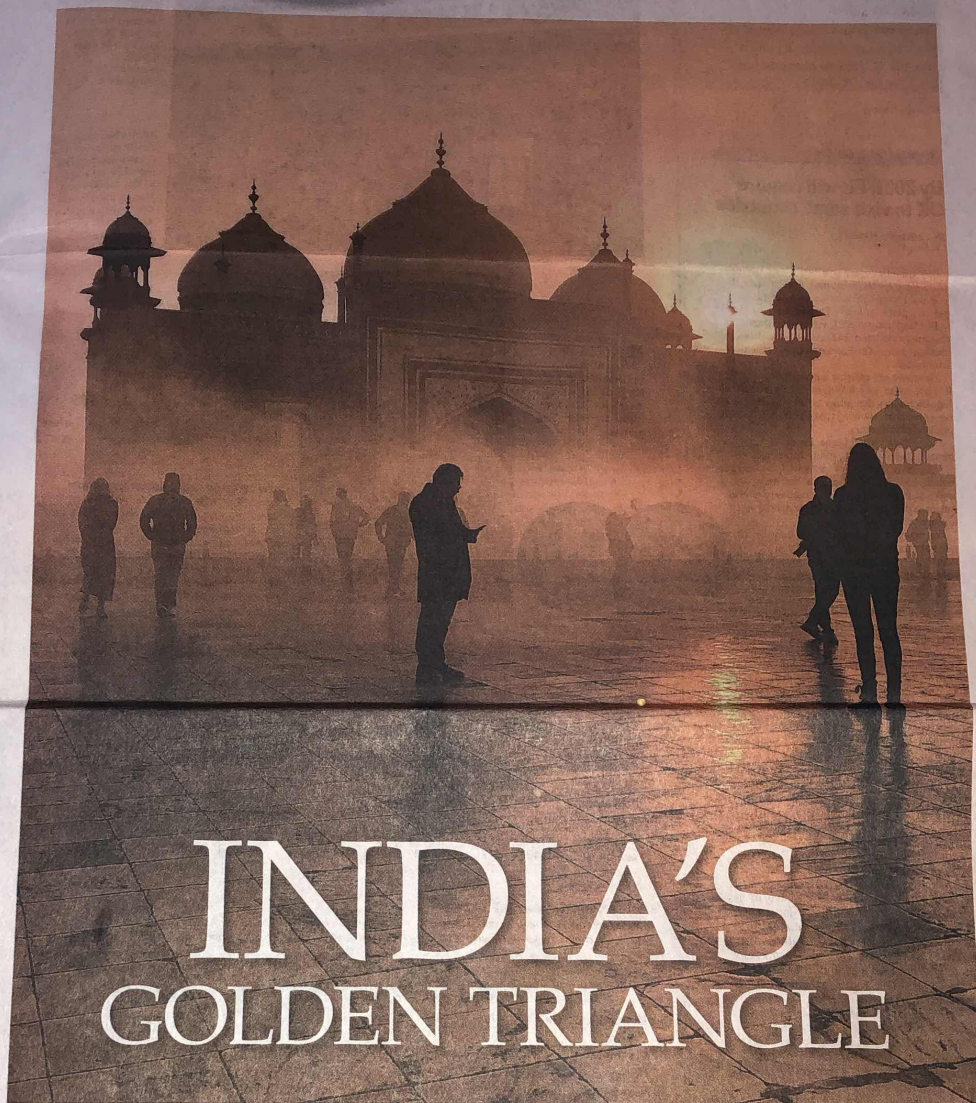


travel



HAWAII'S BACKYARD
Take a tour around the Friendly Isle by bicycle >> E6
SIGNS OF HAWAIIAN LIFE >> E2
LAS VEGAS ADVISOR >> E7



INDIA'S GOLDEN TRIANGLE

The east-facing guesthouse stands on the grounds of the Taj Mahal. Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal as an homage to his third — and favorite — wife, Mumtaz, who died in 1631 while giving birth to her 14th child.

From Delhi to Jaipur, visitors experience rich history, bustling markets and architectural wonders

Story and Photos by Julie L. Kessler | Special to the Star-Advertiser

Traveling in India can often be a tumultuous dance of noise, color and humanity creating an intense sensory overload. It can also be a magical carpet ride of exquisite light, iridescent colors and friendly people.

Delights in Delhi

The Mughal capital with British colonial architecture galore, interesting neighborhoods and wide boulevards is often overwhelmingly full of traffic and

significant smog. Rewards will come with relaxed patience, a comfortable car and talented driver.

Central Delhi's Shangri-La's Eros Hotel was an oasis of panache and tranquility during my January three-night stay. Its perfect location near important sites in this section of Delhi made it a great choice.

At Central Delhi's core is the 126-foot sandstone and granite arch India Gate. Thought to be inspired by Paris' Arc de Triomphe, it was designed by Sir

INSIDE

Tracking big cats on safari through India's "Tiger State." E3

Please see INDIA, E4

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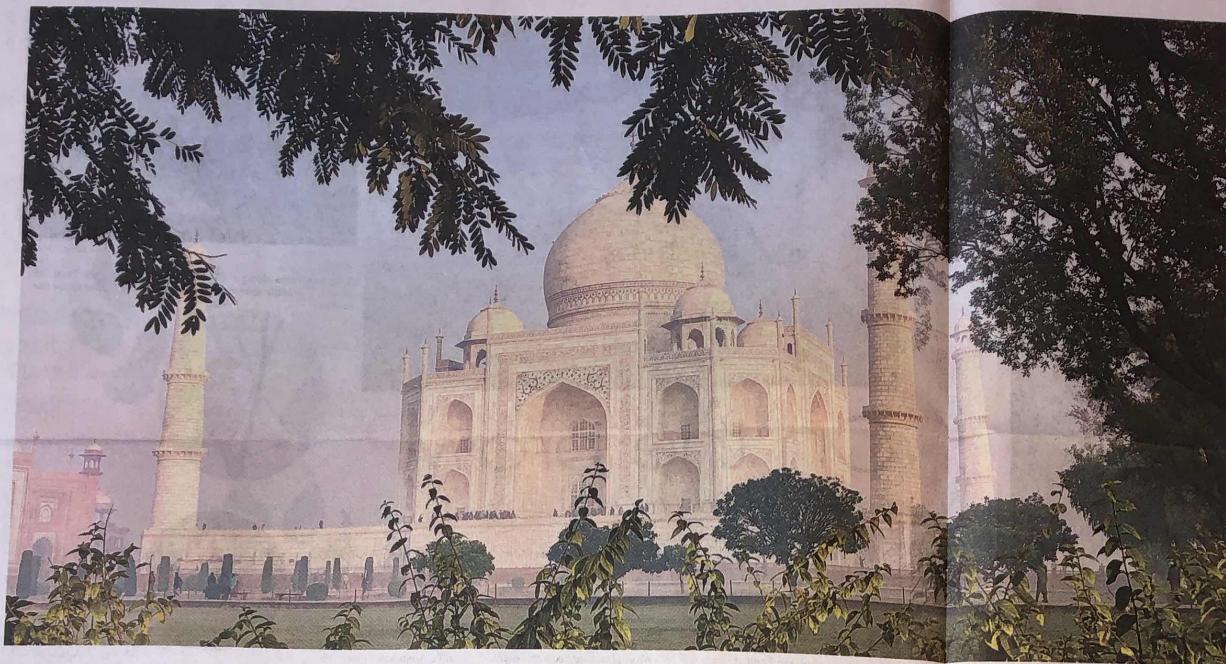
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The Taj Mahal, at daybreak, above. Below at left, young worshippers visit Delhi's Bangla Sahib Gurdwara Sikh Shrine. Below right, the opulent Queen Elizabeth II Suite at Jaipur's Sujan Rajmahal Palace.

INDIA

Continued from E1

Edwin Lutyens completed in 1931 as a memorial to the 90,000 soldiers who died fighting in World War I and the Third Anglo-Afghan War. Families and vendors mill about and often there's a cricket game being played nearby. The neighboring red-and-gray, circular Sansad Bhavan — Parliament House — is nearly dwarfed by the massive Rashtrapati Bhavan, where the Indian president resides. Containing 340 rooms on a 330-acre compound, it includes home affairs, defense, finance and prime minister's offices.

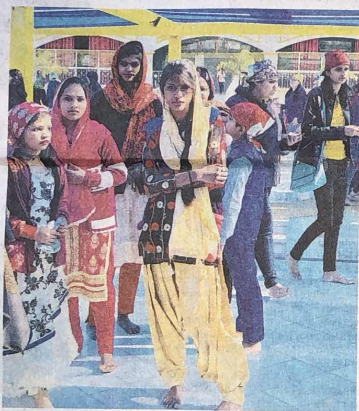
Standing on the site where Guru Har Krishan lived, the enormous white marble and gold-domed Gurdwara Bangla Sahib — Sikh temple — is a hive of colorful, auditory and altruistic activity. Worshippers believe the pools contain holy waters and ritually immerse their feet while chants are continuously sung. At the community kitchen, dozens of people sit cross-legged and chop mountains of vegetables that daily feed more than 10,000 people.

A plethora of historical dioramas, photographs, and documents fill the Mahatma Gandhi Museum Birla House. While industrialist G.D. Birla's houseguest in 1948, Gandhi walked to a prayer meeting in the bungalow's rear garden and was assassinated by a Hindu extremist. Both melancholy and moving, the garden's eternal flame is a potent reminder of Gandhi's enduring spirit.

South Delhi houses two magnificent UNESCO sites: Humayun's Tomb and Qutub Minar. Built by his widow, the red sandstone and marble Humayun's Tomb combines Hindu, Persian and Roman architecture. Restored in 2013, its lovely 26-acre garden is divided into four peaceful quadrants with water channels representing the rivers of Quranic paradise.

The Qutub Minar with its 219-foot sandstone and marble tower was built in 1193 and is India's tallest stone tower. Alternate origin theories abound, from a victory tower reflecting commencement of Muslim rule in India to a minaret so muzzafas could call worshippers to pray.

Old Delhi is crowded and chaotic so it's best to visit this area



PHOTOS BY JULIE L. KESSLER / SPECIAL TO THE STAR-ADVERTISER

IF YOU GO...

India

>> **Getting there:** From Honolulu, Japan Airlines, China Eastern, Delta, Air Canada and United have connecting service (change of planes) to Delhi. Round-trip fares during winter months when weather is best begins at \$1,397. Visas are required for U.S. citizens. The time-consuming application is extremely onerous to complete and requires travelers' religious history and familial information, even if deceased. The government's visa site is temperamental. It's best to use a private service such as CIBT. 800-929-2428, CIBT.com

>> **Travel arrangements:** Perfect Travels provides air-conditioned cars, drivers and English-speaking guides. Services include airport pickup, transfers and monument entry fees for Golden Triangle tours. Six-day packages with five-star hotels including breakfast start at \$1,295 per person. Info: 91-11-2572-1861, perfecttravels.com

>> **Where to stay:** • Shangri-La's Eros Hotel, New Delhi. Central location with outstanding dining and impeccable service at Shang Palace, Sorrento and Tamra restaurants. Its signature Chi Spa has excellent massages. Info: 866-565-5050, shangri-la.com

• Oberoi Amarvilas Hotel, Agra. Ultimate location for visiting the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort set in Mughal grandeur. Info: 800-562-3764, oberoihotels.com

• Sujan Rajmahal Palace, Jaipur. A boutique hotel and dining experience with service so lovely you will be convinced you are royal. Info: 91-11-4617-2700, sujanluxury.com

>> For general tourism information, go to incredibleindia-tourism.org.

secretly visit his various wives and concubines while reducing palace intrigue stemming from nocturnal visits.

The Albert Hall Museum in Jaipur is a 19th-century Indo-Saracenic architectural marvel showcasing 16 galleries that include folk art, ivory, Indian culture and even a 322 B.C. Egyptian mummy. Also pass by at night for a spectacular neon-light display.

If shopping floats your boat, Jaipur is a veritable nirvana for all manner of tribal and fine jewelry, block-print textiles, pashminas and leather goods.

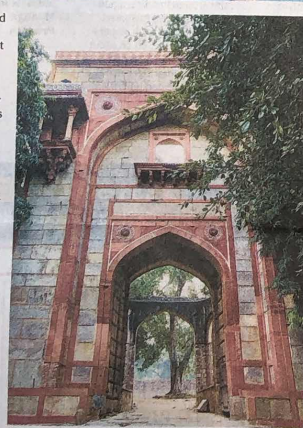
Jaipur, like many Indian cities, is one of contrasts. Within moments, one can see elaborately decorated horses — often en route to vibrant Indian weddings — along with working camels next to late-model cars and scurrying pedestrians.

Traveling in India is not for the faint of heart, but it is also a uniquely marvelous, extraordinary experience.

Julie L. Kessler is a travel writer and legal columnist based in Los Angeles and the author of the award-winning book "Fifty-Fifty: The Clarity of Hindsight." She can be reached at Julie@VagabondLayover.com.



STAR-ADVERTISER



A garden passage, above, leads to Delhi's Humayun's Tomb. At right, the Lahore Gate, named for the city it faces, at Agra Fort.

once you've acclimated a bit. Fifth Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan built Red Fort — also called Lal Qila — in the 17th century as the royal family's main residence. This UNESCO World Heritage Site reflects the apex of Indo-Persian architecture.

My rickshaw ride through Chandni Chowk market competed with bicycles, pedestrians, dogs, cows, hand-pulled rickshaws and horse-drawn carts ferrying people and cargo. Here textiles, wedding items, costume jewelry, food and every spice imaginable nearly overwhelm the senses in a con-

gested, yet colorful, commercial cornucopia.

Also in Old Delhi is India's largest mosque, Jama Masjid, built by Shah Jahan and completed in 1656. It's an enormous red sandstone Mughal statement of pillars and minarets.

The architecture of Agra

For many, seeing Agra Fort and the Taj Mahal are bucket list items. Neither disappoints.

After a four-hour drive from Delhi, I arrived at Agra's Oberoi Amarvilas Hotel, just 1,800 feet from the Taj's East Gate entry. Here breathtaking, head-on Taj views, a magnificent pool and lush gardens were coupled with delightful service.

That afternoon my genial local guide Shiraz accompanied me to the 16th-century Agra Fort. A bit of a misnomer, this UNESCO site is really a fortified palace with the Yamuna River and moat running along its perimeter. Construction was a collective endeavor of the third Mughal Emperor Akbar, son Jahangir and grandson Shah Jahan. From within the fort's 1.8 square miles that included the mint and state treasury, the country was governed. Remnants of mosques, baths, assembly halls, apartments, harem room and dungeon contain Hindu and central Asian architectural features juxtaposed with Bengal and Moorish styles.

Rising with the birds the next day, Shiraz and I hopped into Oberoi's golf cart at 6:30 a.m. At the Taj Mahal five minutes later, any qualms of waking for the sunrise experience quickly dissipated.

In perhaps the most immense display of love-inspired construction, Shah Jahan built the Taj in honor of his third — and favorite — wife, Mumtaz, who died in 1631 while giving birth to her 14th child. Taking 20,000 laborers and 17 years to complete, it became a UNESCO site in 1983.

Entering the gar-

dens at dawn, the Taj breathtakingly comes into full view. Its two side structures were built to maintain symmetry. The western-facing Mecca structure served as a mosque and the eastern-facing was used as a guesthouse. The lighting of the rising, golden sun against misty, slowly evaporating fog was ethereally captivating.

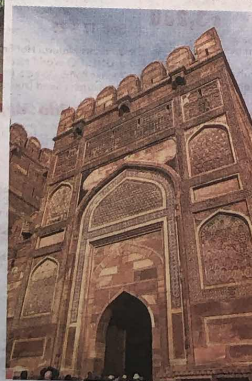
Inside, crown-shaped, hand-cut screens of white marble surround Mumtaz and Shah Jahan's tombs. Inlaid jewels — pietra dura — in the 24 panels took nine years. A veritable drop in the bucket exemplifying an enduring testament to love.

Royal history in Jaipur

Following a four-hour drive, I arrived at the former Jaipur royal family guesthouse, the Sujan Rajmahal Palace in Rajasthan's

capital. Converted to a hotel in the 1970s, it was recently renovated into a 30-room treasure trove with five restaurants and bright hues. Divine rooms and exquisite service allowed me to channel inner royal delusions.

A short distance away is Amber (or Amer) Fort, built by Raja Man Singh in 1592. An excellent example of Hindu-Rajasthani architecture, it became a UNESCO site in 2013. Most interesting were the frescoed arches at the maharaja's residence entryway and the secluded women's quarters, designed so the maharaja could



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