

# LAHORE QUEEN OF CITIES

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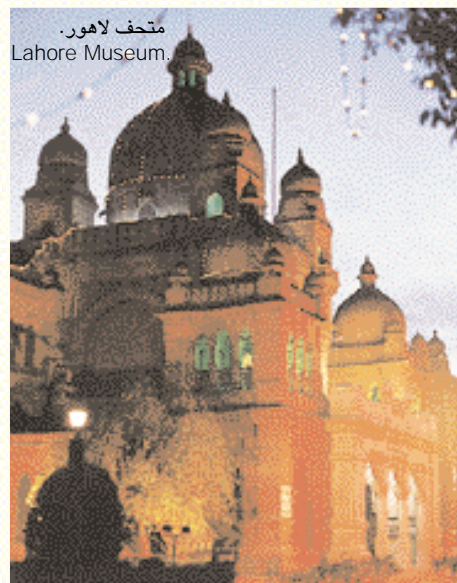
A city bridging many cultures, Lahore is a medley of the architectural splendour and legacy of great empires, a place whose monuments recount astounding tales of proud rulers whose ancestors galloped forth, crossing the fertile plains of the Punjab (lit. five waters, or rivers), to conquer the subcontinent.

Contemporaneous with the Renaissance and Baroque periods in the West, Lahore, in the East, excelled in miniature artwork that was characteristically applied to architecture and jewellery making.

Today, the city, with a population of approximately eight million, is the cultural hub of the modern Islamic state of Pakistan offering a bundle of surprises, not least a lively film industry (known popularly as "Lollywood"), fashion, and cuisine. Moreover, Lahore showcases the beauty and grandeur of its past and present, a truly cosmic city which lingers in the visitor's mind forever. Indeed, the passion to create and build that was so characteristic of the Mughal Emperors, and their immeasurable contributions to art and literature, makes Lahore a priceless experience both in terms of art and spirituality. In its heyday, this was a city that offered tremendous opportunities to inhabitants and visitors alike, deserving the epithet, Queen of Cities.

## Historical Profile

Archaeological discoveries at Lahore's Bhatti Gate provide evidence for the birth of Labokla – the ancient name of Lahore. Then a small village in 145CE, the history of Lahore can actually be seen on records dating from 1021 when the foreign invasions disrupted the routing structure of the region. The early Greeks, Guptas, Mongols, Turks, Pathans and Aryans were the first invaders. Later,



متحف لاهور.  
Lahore Museum.

Mahmud of Ghaznavi laid the first stone of stability on the soil of Lahore and established the Ghaznavid dynasty which ruled there from 1021 to 1186. During his reign, trade flourished and Lahore became home for future rulers. The Lahore Mandi (wholesale market) behind Bhatti Gate has been in business since it was established in the 11th Century and is the first trading place at Lahore.

When the Ghaznavid era ended, a tidal wave of invaders stormed Lahore leaving behind them tales of horror and barbarity. At the ➤

مسجد بادشاہی.  
Badshahi Mosque.



**The foundation for the Lahore Fort was laid by Akbar, and the city served as his capital for fourteen years. The façade of the fort, namely the Akbari Gate, has, on its adjoining wall (745 metres squared) images of life, inlaid with small pieces of glazed tiles depicting Akbar's reign, and including scenes of his army which consisted of five thousand elephants.**

time, rebels from the Lodhi dynasty conspired with Babur, a descendant of Genghis Khan and pre-eminent Mughal.

Following the Mughal conquest, Lahore sank deep in the shadow of instability that lasted a hundred years – characterized by looting and destruction from foreign invasions. Maharaja Ranjit Singh defeated the Afghans and eventually restored peace, and Lahore became the seat of power.

The British presence in the subcontinent began as a trading interest via the auspices of the East India Company, which was turned into a smooth and successful conquest of the region. The Sikh rulers lost the first Anglo-Sikh War and the British Empire, later to become known as the Raj, set up a Political Residence at Lahore in 1845 in accordance with the Treaty of Lahore, signed at a lavish ceremony in which the Koh-I-Noor diamond (Mountain of Light weighing 229 carats) was formally and ceremonially handed over to the British authorities, thus symbolizing British control and interest.

The famous Mall Road served as a meeting place for intellectuals as well as socialites at the time, with its many coffee shops, and clubs for the elite. Following the bloody Partition of the subcontinent in 1947, these were almost all either demolished or converted into hotels.

## The Mughal Dynasty

Babur's dream of conquering the subcontinent had turned into reality. Having fought a victorious battle (in 1526), the refined emperor fortified his seat of power at Delhi and laid the foundation of the great Mughal dynasty which still bear the fruits of its glory that lasted almost two centuries.

Sher Shah Suri later forced Humayun, Babur's son, into exile in Persia. A great Pathan builder, Sher Shah ruled only for a brief period of time (1530–1545) but presented the region with perhaps one of its greatest achievements in communication – the Shahi (Grand Trunk) Road, familiarly known as the GT Road, which links East with West via the historic Khyber Pass, north-west of Lahore.



Emperor Jehangir's Tomb.

قبر الإمبراطور «جهانگیر».

Humayun returned after the death of Sher Shah to claim back his throne in 1554, and thereafter his son and successor, Akbar (1556–1605) would initiate the building up one of the world's greatest empires.

Akbar is described as "Chinese-like, lean, sparse of beard, wrinkled and not very fair" with "eyes [that] are small but extremely vivid". In records it is stated that, "When he looks at you it seems as if they hurt you with their brightness, and thus nothing escapes his notice .. they also reveal sharpness of mind and keenness of intellect". (Letter from Father Montserrat, c.1580) Akbar's successors built solid forts all over the subcontinent. Moreover, Abul-Fazal, his prime minister, and a man of vision not to mention a gifted calligrapher, founded the Royal Mint, a carpet factory and institutions to promote the arts and literature.

Etched in the emulsion of his dreams, Shah Jahan, son of emperor Jehangir, presented Lahore – and the world – perhaps the most enduring impressions of Mughal grandeur, artistry and sheer majesty. During his reign, Shah Jahan appointed his special viceroy to

construct various building projects within and beyond Lahore. Noor Jahan, Jehangir's beloved wife upon whom he doted, practically took control of the day-to-day administrative work due to her husband's passionate involvement in the arts, literature and the pursuit of hunting. According to her autobiography, Noor Jahan quotes Jehangir as saying: "I have purchased Lahore with my life - by giving my life for Lahore".

Today, Noor Jahan's tomb is contained within the vastness of Jehangir's mausoleum, and stands in a sorry state.

Aurangzeb succeeded the throne (1618–1707) after sentencing his father, Shah Jahan, to incarceration, and, according to historians, murdering his elder brother, Dara Shikoh, thus bringing the Mughal dynasty towards its eventual demise. Shah Zafar, Aurangzeb's other brother and his immediate successor, its coming downfall, but could do no more than contribute to its legacy in poetry and prose. His final poem epilogues the sense of sorrow and defeat:

Lagta nahi hai Jee maira ugray dayar mein itni ➔



ijegh kahan hai dil e daagh daar mein kitna hai kam naseeb Zafar dafn kav liey Doo gaz zamin bhi na mili, ku-e-yar mein (Not any more this soul of mine belongs in this ruined land nor a soft corner in the hearts unkind how unfortunate, Zafar, for a burial, Two mere metres of land unavailable on the face of the Earth).

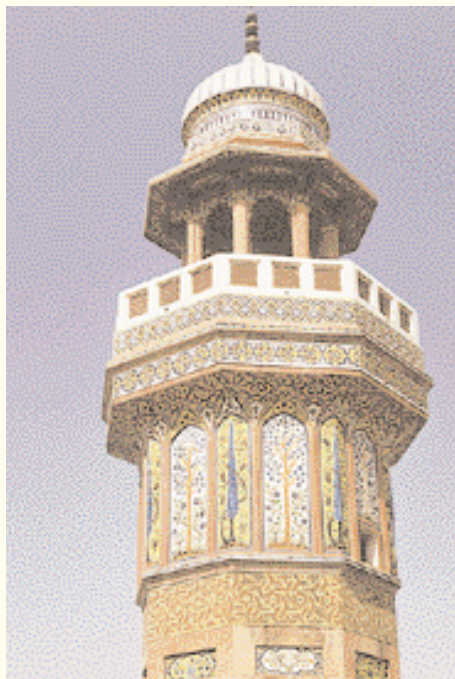
## Religious and Cultural Landmarks

The foundation for the Lahore Fort was laid by Akbar, and the city served as his capital for fourteen years. The façade of the fort, namely the Akbari Gate, has, on its adjoining wall (745 metres squared) images of life, inlaid with small pieces of glazed tiles depicting Akbar's reign, and including scenes of his army which consisted of five thousand elephants. The Masti Gate had open corbels in the parapet designed to bombard rocks against invading forces. The imposing Alamgiri Gate – one of the entrances to Lahore Fort - was constructed by Aurangzeb Alamgir. But the real graceful element here is owed to the architectural genius of Shah Jahan, grandson of Akbar, who created the Sheesh Mahal (Hall of Mirrors) which brilliantly displays the art of mirror inlay. Opposite to the Sheesh Mahal is the Nau-Lakha Pavilion with its arched roof



Wazir Khan Mosque.

جامع الوزیر.



منارة جامع الوزیر.  
Minaratte of Wazir Khan Mosque.

stretching downwards in a typically Bengali style. This is constructed in pure white marble. The interior is adorned in Pietra Dura, exhibiting a single miniature flower inlaid with over a hundred small pieces of petals made up of semi-precious gems and stones. The Fort was used by the Mughal emperors as their Royal Palace, and was fully equipped with sleeping chambers and a Turkish bath with hot and cold running water.

Wazir Khan Mosque (1663) is regarded as the most beautiful mosque in the subcontinent and highlights unique glazed inlay tilework and was influenced by foreign expertise from Persia and Central Asia, allowing a certain versatility. West of the Wazir Khan Mosque is the Sonehri Masjid (Golden Mosque). The Shalimar Bagh, or Garden of Love, with its hundreds of splashing water fountains, is also situated here, and depicts the richness and sheer luxuriance of the Mughal lifestyle. Ali Mardan Khan ingeniously engineered the Canal system around these gardens, which were waterways laid out in straight lines, maintaining regular irrigation and thus enhancing the cooling effect within the entire three-tiered gardens complex. The elegantly arched pavilions that overlook the main platform abounding with 150 fountains served as the main stage for performers to entertain the royal family.

Shah Jahan completed the magnificent Mausoleum of Jehangir, and the latter, in his lifetime, introduced Pietra Dura in Mughal artwork. Indeed, the platform of his tomb portrays absolute fineness of this art form. But it is the Badshahi Mosque, at the time the world's largest mosque, which is perhaps the emperor's most worthy – if not only – contribution to Mughal architecture. The 170 square metre building is dressed in red stone and capped with enormous white marble domes. The eight arched pillars – also of massive proportion - support these domes, and the interior wall and ceiling of the mosque's main prayer chamber is beautifully decorated with floral paintings.

The ornate tomb of Ranjit Singh and the white marble pavilion opposite the Fort, in the Old City, are perhaps the finest specimens of Sikh architecture in existence – a gift to Lahore during the rule of Ranjit Singh (1799-1839).

The British (1849-1947) built railways and roads, and institutionalised public education and healthcare. The buildings that are of Mughal-cum Victorian style include the General Post Office, Lawrence Montgomery Hall (now Jinnah Library), the Railway Station building and Punjab University – all rated among the rich heritage of Lahore.

## Religious and Educational Institutions

The Badshahi Mosque is equipped with a religious Madrasa, or school, where not only religious instruction but also studies in science can be sought. Kinnaird College for Women, Aitchison College, King Edward's Medical College and Mayo Hospital and Medical School, founded by the British, continue to serve even today and are among the most elite educational centres of the country. In addition, The National College of Arts, The Government College and Punjab University compose the main educational institutes of Lahore.

## Lahore Museum

Prince Albert inaugurated, in 1894, a world class museum at Lahore that now treasures testimonials of time immemorial, some more than 3,000 years old, from original Gandhara art pieces to documentary records of the Partition. Outside the museum building stands the 18th Century cannon gun, zam-zama. ■