

# The Essential Sights

# of LAHORE



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Lahore, Pakistan is over 2000 years old, making it one of the oldest living cities in the world. It is a place with a rich cultural history and during its existence all conquerors from the North (and many different settlers) came through Lahore at some point, including the Ghaznavids, Khiljis, Tughlaqs, Sayyids, Lodhis, Suris and Mughals. In regards to tourism, it is a city of untapped potential and travelers with an interest in historic monuments and magnificent architecture should seriously consider adding Lahore to their list of "must see" places.

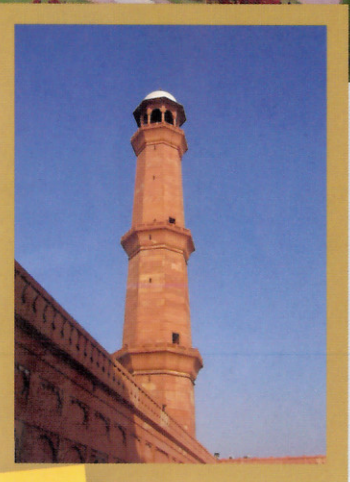
## BADSHAHI MOSQUE

The magnificent Badshahi Mosque was built under the patronage of the sixth Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb Alamgir. It was completed in 1673 under the supervision of Aurangzeb's foster brother Muzaffar Hussain who was appointed governor of Lahore in May of 1671 and held this post until 1675. It is the Mughal Empire's final architectural contribution to Lahore.

The Mosque is one of the largest building made during the reign of Aurangzeb, and in terms of space, it is one of the largest mosques in the Indian subcontinent. The area

within the mosque measures approximately 150 meters on each side and is said to be capable of holding up to 100,000 people.

Just outside the Mosque is the Tomb of Allama Mohammed Iqbal - a 20th Century poet and one of the great thinkers in Pakistan's history. He is widely credited with proposing the idea of an independent Pakistan.





### LAHORE FORT

Directly across from the Badshahi Mosque is the Lahore Fort (also known as Shahi Qila). This impressive structure

has a long and storied history and parts of it were built, altered and rebuilt between the years 1566 and 1673. It is another spectacular example of Mughal architecture and is very similar to other forts in Agra and Delhi. It is essentially a series of structures, all of which were built at different times by different Mughal emperors like Akbar and Jehangir which in turn are surrounded by a massive wall.

Like any historical site, the real treat of the Lahore Fort is in the details. Precious stones, carvings, mosaic and rough tiles and murals are still contained throughout and one can spend considerable time just taking it all in.

One of the more memorable structures in the Lahore Fort is the Shish Mahal (also known as the Palace of Mirrors). It was built in 1631-32 by Shah Jahan as a retreat for the empress and her court.

The Lahore Fort is also home to Pakistan's only surviving elephant steps, the actual ones used by the world's largest land mammals when members of the Royal Family wanted to make an extremely grand entrance or exit.

### OLD CITY

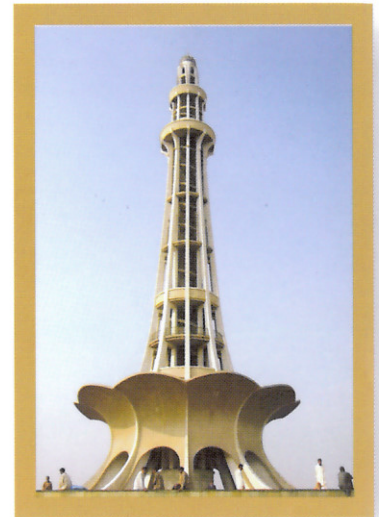
The Old City is the section of Lahore that was fortified by a city wall during the Mughal era. The wall had 13 gates, and much of it still remains intact today. The Old City is considered to be the heart of Lahore and is home to a thriving shopping district and several important mosques. The Badshahi Mosque and the Lahore Fort are located just outside the Northeast corner of the Old City.



### THE MINAR-I-PAKISTAN

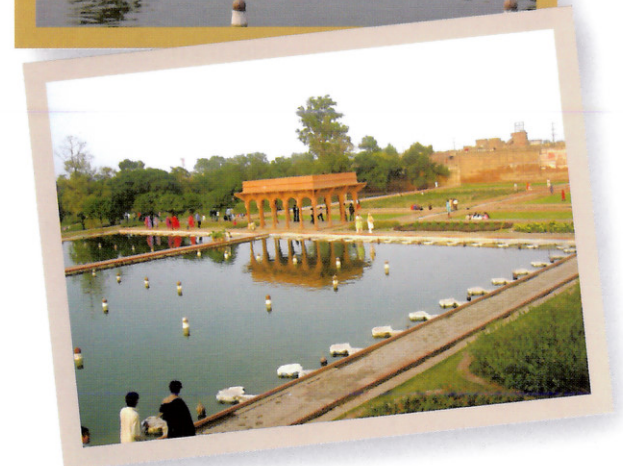
In the middle of Iqbal Park in Lahore stands Minar-e-Pakistan, a tall concrete tower that was built as a tribute to the creation of Pakistan. It is also known as Pakistan's tower (some locals even refer to it as the country's Eiffel Tower) and was designed by Murad Khan, a Turkish architect.

The Minar-e-Pakistan was built in 1960 on the same spot where the Muslim League passed the famous Lahore Resolution twenty years earlier. The Resolution demanded a separate homeland for the Muslims of India. It is now officially recognized as the National Monument of Pakistan.



### SHALIMAR GARDENS

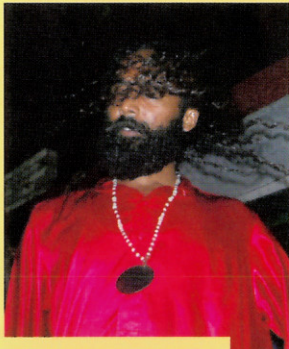
Shalimar Gardens was conceived in the 1600s and is the only surviving Mughal garden/park in Lahore. It is fairly large and contains many impressive white marble buildings in typical Shah Jahani style. The gardens are also home to many pools, waterfalls and ornamental ponds. Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit visited Shalimar Gardens in the early 1960s.



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## SUFI NIGHT

One of the most unique things one can do in Lahore takes place every Thursday night at the 700-year-old Shrine of Baba Shah Jamal. At this time, several drumbeaters gather together to play their hypnotic beats for a packed crowd. The weekly event has come to be known as "Sufi Night."



Sufism is a traditional form of Islamic mysticism with many different forms and interpretations, but the most common theme is the pursuit of spiritual freedom. The drumbeaters in Lahore gain this through music and dancing.



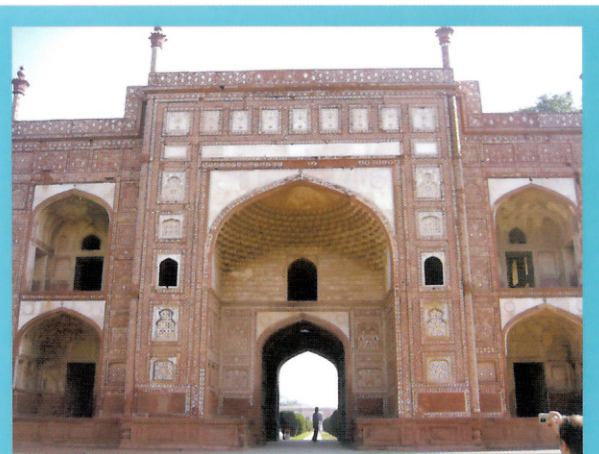
A regular group of drummers at this event is the famed Gongasain brothers, the most renowned musicians of their kind in Pakistan. Amazingly, one of the brothers is deaf and learned how to drum by feeling the vibrations on his stomach. The fact that the two play in unison and harmony is a testament to their skill and dedication.

The part of the Shrine where the Gongasain brothers perform is actually quite small so arrive early to make sure you get in (and be prepared to remove your shoes) The performance starts roughly around 11:00 pm.

The Gongasain brothers are complimented by four dancers who twirl around in clockwise fashion while shaking their heads vigorously from left to right as if in a trance. The whole experience can be quite invigorating to behold, especially for first-time visitors to Lahore.

## JEHANGIR'S TOMB

Located just outside of northern Lahore is Emperor Jehangir's Tomb. It was constructed in 1637 by his son Shah Jahan and designed by his widow, Nur Jahan. Like most



historical Mughal buildings in Lahore, the main tomb is surrounded by many other structures and walls.

The Tomb has suffered much over the years, with many of its original ornaments and decorations having been stripped away, but the British government restored much of it in 1889-90. Restoration work is still being done to it at the present time.

The roof of Jehangir's Tomb has four towers and offers a spectacular view of the whole Tomb complex.

Just across the road from Jehangir's Tomb is one belonging to Nur Jahan. It is interesting to note that the woman who designed such an ornate final resting place for her husband conceived a somewhat modest one for herself.

## LAHORE MUSEUM

One could spend a few days at the Lahore Museum if they had the time to examine each and every article it contains. It has nearly 20 galleries containing items from prehistoric times and art both old and new.

And not everything at the Lahore Museum focuses on Muslim culture. There is a Hindu section and a statue of the fasting Buddha that is a famed image around the world:



## FLAG LOWERING CEREMONY

A flag lowering ceremony has been taking place just before sunset on the border of Pakistan and India every day since 1948 (excluding rainy days). The crowds start to gather on both sides of the border about an hour early, eagerly anticipating the evening's festivities. The event is so popular that grandstands have been built to accommodate everyone and additional seats are being constructed at this time.

The time leading up to the actual flag lowering is filled with bombastic music including national anthems and other patriotic songs. Chants of "Pakistan zindabad!" ("Long Live Pakistan") are shouted to thunderous applause.

A group of soldiers do their best to help get the crowd whipped into a frenzy. This mainly involves animated marching and





exaggerated moves designed to outdo what their counterparts are doing over in India. People are then selected from the crowd to run the Pakistani flag back and forth in front of the screaming masses to further incite them. An elderly gentleman with a Pakistani flag and matching shirt is also present and screaming "Pakistan zindabad! Pakistan zindabad!" over and over. Apparently he has been doing this every day for many years.

The whole atmosphere is one of a major sporting event. The crowd on the Indian side of the border is usually much larger than the Pakistani side, which makes sense when you compare the populations of the two countries. Still, it is said that for what the Pakistani group lacks in crowd size, they make up for in crowd passion.

The actual flag lowering lasts only a few moments. When it is done, the gates to the two countries are closed and the head soldiers salute each other and then march their folded flags back to safekeeping amidst huge ovations.

#### PEOPLE WATCHING

If people watching is your thing, then Lahore offers plenty of opportunities to observe a colorful cast of characters going about their daily routines.

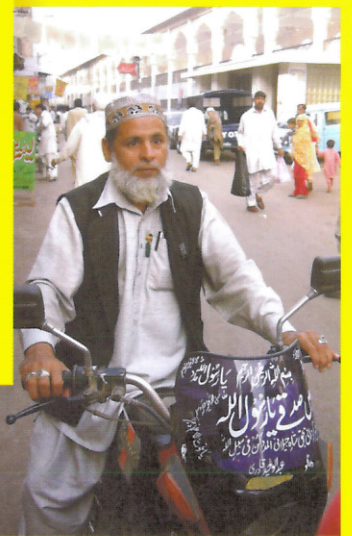
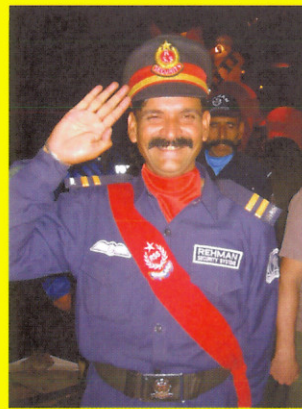
Many of the folks have faces alone which give indications that they have led interesting lives and have plenty of stories to tell.

There is also no shortage of cute children in Lahore who are only too eager to pose for the camera.

If you choose to watch people in Lahore, then you



better get used to being watched as well, especially if you're from the West. The citizens are welcoming but also curious about the reasons why someone would visit their home. The bottom line is that they love their country and want those who visit to love it as well.



#### HOW TO GET THERE

Visiting Lahore from Bangkok has never been easier, as Pakistan International Airlines now offers two flights a week and Thai Airways five flights a week to this vibrant and exciting city.