



The Taj Mahal

The Taj Mahal is a beautiful monument that is found in Agra, India.

Agra was the home of the Mughal emperors until 1637. Shah Jahan, the fifth Mughal emperor, had the Taj Mahal built as a mausoleum (a tomb) for his beloved second wife, Arjumand Banu. She died in 1630 after giving birth to their 14th child. When her remains were moved to the Taj Mahal, she became known as Mumtaz Mahal.

The Taj is part of a large complex that also includes a gateway, a garden, a mosque, and a guest house. The Persian-style garden is large and elaborate, with long pools of water that reflect the Taj. The central dome of the Taj is 58 feet wide and 213 feet high. Mumtaz Mahal is entombed in a lower chamber. After the Shah's death, his body was placed next to hers.

Shah Jahan employed Ustad Ahmad, the most famous Persian architect of the day, to design the complex. Twenty thousand workers and master craftsmen from all over India and Asia were brought to Agra to carry out his design. Over 1,000 elephants transported the finest building materials found in India.

The mausoleum is made entirely of white marble, inlaid with precious and semi-precious gems. Light from the sun reflects off the marble during the day and moonlight reflects off it at night, which adds to its beauty. The mosque and the guest house on either side of it were built from red sandstone. It took 22 years to complete the project.

The Taj Mahal is an outstanding example of Islamic art and architecture. Some people think it is the most beautiful building on earth. In 1983, the United Nations declared it a World Heritage Site. Over the years, millions of tourists have visited it.

**COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS**

A. True or False. Read the statements below. If the statement is true, write T beside the sentence. If it is false, write F. If it is false, correct the information.

1. The Taj Mahal was built in the 17th century. _____
2. The emperor, Shah Jahan, is buried in the Taj Mahal. _____
3. All the people who worked on the Taj Mahal were from the local area. _____
4. All the building materials for the Taj Mahal were found in Agra. _____
5. The entire mosque is made of white marble. _____

B. Practice asking and answering the following questions with your partner. Then write the answers in complete sentences.

1. Where is the Taj Mahal located? _____

2. Why did the emperor, Shah Jahan, have the Taj Mahal built? _____

3. Briefly describe the Taj Mahal. _____

4. Who designed the Taj Mahal and who built it? _____

5. How were the building materials transported to Agra? _____

6. How does the white marble add to the beauty of the mausoleum? _____

7. Why did the United Nations declare the Taj Mahal a World Heritage Site? _____


VOCABULARY REVIEW
A. Match the words on the left with correct meaning on the right.

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|----------------------|---|
| _____ 1. monument | a) a skilled worker who makes things with his hands |
| _____ 2. emperor | b) a rounded roof with a circular base |
| _____ 3. mausoleum | c) very special, excellent |
| _____ 4. mosque | d) ruler, leader |
| _____ 5. elaborate | e) very valuable |
| _____ 6. reflect | f) a building in which Moslems pray |
| _____ 7. outstanding | g) throw back light or an image |
| _____ 8. craftsman | h) building or statue in memory of someone or something |
| _____ 9. precious | i) a large place to keep the body after a person dies |
| _____ 10. dome | j) having great detail; very carefully planned |

B. Choose the correct word from the left column above to complete the following sentences.

1. Women have to cover their heads when they go into a _____ to pray.
2. There is a big _____ in front of the government building. It is in memory of all the soldiers who lost their lives in the wars.
3. He makes very beautiful furniture. He is a very talented _____ .
4. They made very _____ plans for the wedding reception.
5. He is an _____ high school student. He will do very well in university.

C. Choose the word(s) with the closest meaning to the underlined words in the following sentences.

1. When Arjumand Banu died, her remains were moved to the Taj Mahal
 a) money b) jewels c) dead body
2. The Taj is part of a large complex.
 a) complicated b) a large structure made up of several parts c) country
3. Twenty thousand workers were brought in to carry out his design.
 a) complete b) lift c) draw
4. The mausoleum is made of white marble, inlaid with precious gems.
 a) wood b) pictures c) valuable stones
5. The United Nations declared it a World Heritage site in 1983.
 a) opened b) formally announced c) visited