

NCT EST.
1911

STATE / UT PROFILE · REPUBLIC OF INDIA

Delhi

History, Government, Geography, Demographics, Culture, Education, Economy, Industries, Transport & Environment — a complete portrait of India's National Capital Territory, its challenges, and its future

21.5M

POPULATION, 2024 EST.

₹5.12L

PER CAPITA INCOME

₹11.07L Cr 13

GSDP, 2023-24

DISTRICTS (2026)

Compiled July 2026 · Sources: Census of India, PRS Legislative Research, Economic Survey of Delhi, CPCB, Delhi High Court, Forest Department of Delhi, NIRF, Wikipedia-cross-checked primary data

CONTENTS

Table of Contents

Ch.	Chapter	Page
01	Delhi at a Glance	3
02	History	4
03	Government, Politics & Administration	6
04	Geography & Districts	8
05	Population & Demographics	12
06	Culture, Festivals & Cuisine	14
07	Education & Research Institutions	15
08	Cities & Urban Areas	17
09	The Economy	19
10	Industries & What Drives Them	21
11	Transport & Connectivity	24
12	Environment, Wildlife & Biodiversity	26
13	Problems Facing Delhi	28
14	Solutions & Policy Responses	31
15	What Delhi Can Learn From Other Global Cities	33
16	Future Growth & Potential	37
17	Notable Facts	39

Page numbers reflect the final PDF pagination.

Delhi at a Glance

India's National Capital Territory is a city-state unlike any other in the country: a seat of national government, a 3,000-year-old settlement layered with seven historic cities, and one of the most densely populated, economically productive, and environmentally stressed urban regions on Earth.

New Delhi

CAPITAL / SEAT OF GOVT.

1,484 km²

TOTAL NCT AREA

1911 / 1931

CAPITAL SHIFT / NEW DELHI
INAUGURATED

11,297 /km²

POPULATION DENSITY

**₹11.07 lakh
Cr**

GSDP, 2023-24 (~US\$130B)

85% Services

SHARE OF GSDP

“Delhi's per-capita income of ₹5,12,131 (2023-24) is roughly 2.4 times India's national average — yet nearly half its population still lives in slums or unauthorized colonies without full civic amenities.

SOURCE: PRS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH; DELHI URBAN SHELTER IMPROVEMENT BOARD, 2012

Snapshot

Delhi sits on the Indo-Gangetic plain straddling the Yamuna River, bordered by Haryana on three sides and Uttar Pradesh to the east. It became a Union Territory in 1956 and gained special National Capital Territory status with its own legislature in 1991-92. Governance is split between the Delhi government (NCT), the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, the New Delhi Municipal Council, and the central government, which retains control of law and order and land — a layered structure examined in detail in Chapter 03 and that shapes nearly every policy challenge covered later in this report. Administratively, Delhi is organized into 13 districts as of January 2026 (up from 11), reflecting continued urban expansion and administrative reorganization roughly every decade since the 1970s.

History

Few cities on Earth have been built, destroyed, and rebuilt as many times as Delhi. Its story runs from a legendary Mahabharata-era capital through seven successive walled cities, two great Islamic empires, and a 20th-century British capital, to today's sprawling National Capital Territory.

- **c. 400 BCE - 1200s CE — Ancient & Legendary Origins**
Tradition identifies Delhi with Indraprastha, capital of the Pandavas in the Mahabharata, conventionally sited at Purana Qila. Archaeological finds — Ochre Coloured Pottery near the Red Fort (c. 2000 BCE) and Painted Grey Ware (c. 1200 BCE) — confirm ancient settlement, though no artifact directly proves the epic connection. Delhi's continuously recorded history begins with the 8th-century Tomar Rajput dynasty.
- **1052 — Lal Kot, the First City**
Tomar Rajput king Anangpal Tomar founds Lal Kot. It is conquered in 1180 by the Chahamanas (Chauhans) rulers of Ajmer and renamed Qila Rai Pithora.
- **1192 - 1526 — The Delhi Sultanate: Five Dynasties, Three More Cities**
Qutb-ud-din Aibak founds the Slave (Mamluk) dynasty in 1206 and begins the Qutub Minar — at 72.5 metres, still the world's tallest brick minaret. The Khalji dynasty builds Siri (early 1300s); the Tughlaqs build Tughlaqabad (c. 1321), Jahanpanah (1320s-30s), and Firozabad (c. 1354). Timur sacks the city in 1398. The Sultanate ends in 1526 when Babur defeats Ibrahim Lodi at the First Battle of Panipat.
- **1526 - 1857 — The Mughal Era and Shahjahanabad**
Early Mughal emperors rule chiefly from Agra; Humayun begins Purana Qila (Dinpanah), completed by rival ruler Sher Shah Suri. Shah Jahan restores Delhi's primacy, commissioning chief architect Ustad Ahmad Lahori to build the walled city of Shahjahanabad (1638-1648) — the seventh historic city — containing the Red Fort and Jama Masjid, with Chandni Chowk laid out by his daughter Jahanara Begum. Post-Aurangzeb decline brings Persian and Afghan invasions (Nader Shah's 1739 sack killed over 30,000) before the British defeat Maratha forces at the Battle of Delhi in 1803.
- **1857 — Revolt and the End of Mughal Rule**
Sepoys seize Delhi and proclaim the aged Bahadur Shah Zafar II Emperor of India. The British recapture the city after a siege, exile Zafar to Rangoon, and end the Mughal dynasty — beginning direct Crown rule.
- **1911 - 1931 — Capital of British India**
At the Delhi Durbar of 12 December 1911, King George V announces the transfer of India's capital from Calcutta to Delhi. Architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker design a new capital on Raisina Hill; New Delhi is formally inaugurated on 13 February 1931.

1947 - Present — Independence and the Modern NCT

New Delhi becomes the seat of independent India's government in 1947. Partition brings roughly 500,000 Hindu and Sikh refugees into the city (mostly from West Punjab) while about 300,000 Muslims leave for Pakistan, permanently reshaping Delhi's demographic and cultural character. Delhi becomes a Union Territory in 1956, gains a Lieutenant Governor in 1966, and is redesignated the National Capital Territory of Delhi with its own legislative assembly under the 69th Constitutional Amendment (1991-92). Since then, sustained in-migration has driven Delhi into one of the largest metropolitan agglomerations on the planet.

“Delhi is the only city in the world that can claim seven complete, successive historic capitals within its modern municipal boundary — from 11th-century Lal Kot to Shah Jahan's 17th-century Shahjahanabad.

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA, "HISTORY OF DELHI" / HEARN, "THE SEVEN CITIES OF DELHI" (1906)

Government, Politics & Administration

No other Indian state or UT divides power quite like Delhi does: an elected government runs most day-to-day administration, while a centrally appointed Lieutenant Governor and the Union government retain control of police, public order, and land — a structure that has produced some of the country's sharpest federal-versus-territory legal battles.

70

DELHI LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY SEATS (UNICAMERAL)

7 / 3

LOK SABHA / RAJYA SABHA SEATS

60

DELHI HIGH COURT SANCTIONED JUDGES (45 PERMANENT + 15 ADDITIONAL)

250

MUNICIPAL CORPORATION OF DELHI WARDS

A three-way split of power. The Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) is a hybrid unlike any full state's: a unicameral, 70-seat Legislative Assembly (re-established 2 January 1992 under the 69th Constitutional Amendment and the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991) elects a Chief Minister and Council of Ministers who administer most state subjects, while a Lieutenant Governor — appointed by the President as the Union's representative — retains control over police, public order, and land, the three subjects explicitly excluded from the elected government's remit. This split has repeatedly reached the Supreme Court: the landmark *Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India* rulings sought to clarify the boundary, and the Government of NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Act, 2021 and later a 2023 ordinance further shifted control over civil-service transfers and postings toward the Lieutenant Governor, keeping the center-versus-territory tension a live issue rather than a settled one.

Judiciary and local bodies. The Delhi High Court was established on 31 October 1966 with just four judges; its sanctioned strength has since grown to 45 permanent and 15 additional judges (60 total), reflecting the caseload of a court that serves both the union territory's residents and a disproportionate share of India's high-profile constitutional litigation given its seat in the national capital. At the municipal level, the East, North, and South Delhi Municipal Corporations — split in 2012 to make each more manageable — were reunified into a single Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) on 22 May 2022, now covering 1,397.3 km² through 250 wards grouped into 12 zones and headed by an elected Mayor. The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) and the Delhi Cantonment

Board administer the government core and cantonment area as separate, smaller civic bodies alongside the MCD.

“Delhi's elected government controls health, education, and most public services — but not the police force patrolling its own streets, a division of power that has twice reached India's Supreme Court for clarification.

SOURCE: SUPREME COURT OBSERVER; GNCTD (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2021

Geography & Districts

Delhi's physical setting — a river plain pinned against a rocky ridge — has shaped its urban form for a thousand years. Administratively, the city has been repeatedly redrawn: from 4 districts in the 1970s, to 9 (1997-2012), to 11 (2012-2025), to 13 districts effective 1 January 2026.

Physical Geography

Delhi lies on the Indo-Gangetic plain at roughly 28.6°N, 77.2°E, straddling the Yamuna River, and is bordered by Haryana to the north, west, and south, and Uttar Pradesh to the east. The NCT covers approximately 1,484 km² — India's largest city by area — of which about 700 km² is urbanized and 783 km² remains rural/peri-urban. The Yamuna floodplain provides fertile alluvial soil but is flood-prone, while the Delhi Ridge — a northward extension of the Aravalli Range entering from the south and arcing around the west, northwest, and northeast — reaches a maximum elevation of 318 metres and functions as the city's key green lung and groundwater recharge zone. The climate is dry-winter humid subtropical, bordering hot semi-arid: summer highs regularly exceed 39°C (peaking near 42°C in late May), winters bring January lows around 7°C with heavy fog, and the July-September monsoon delivers most of the roughly 774 mm of average annual rainfall. Delhi sits in Seismic Zone IV, a moderately high earthquake-risk category.

1,484 km²

TOTAL NCT AREA

318 m

MAX ELEVATION, DELHI RIDGE

774 mm

AVG. ANNUAL RAINFALL

Zone IV

SEISMIC RISK CATEGORY

Administrative Evolution

Delhi's district map has changed roughly every decade: 4 districts through the 1970s-90s; expansion to 9 districts and 27 sub-divisions between 1997 and 2012; a move to 11 districts in September 2012 with the addition of South East Delhi and Shahdara; and, most recently, a Delhi Cabinet-approved reorganization into 13 districts effective 1 January 2026, with sub-divisions rising from 33 to 39. Three new districts — Old Delhi, Central North Delhi, and Outer North Delhi — were carved mainly from the former Central and North/North West Delhi districts, while Shahdara was dissolved and folded back into North East and East Delhi.

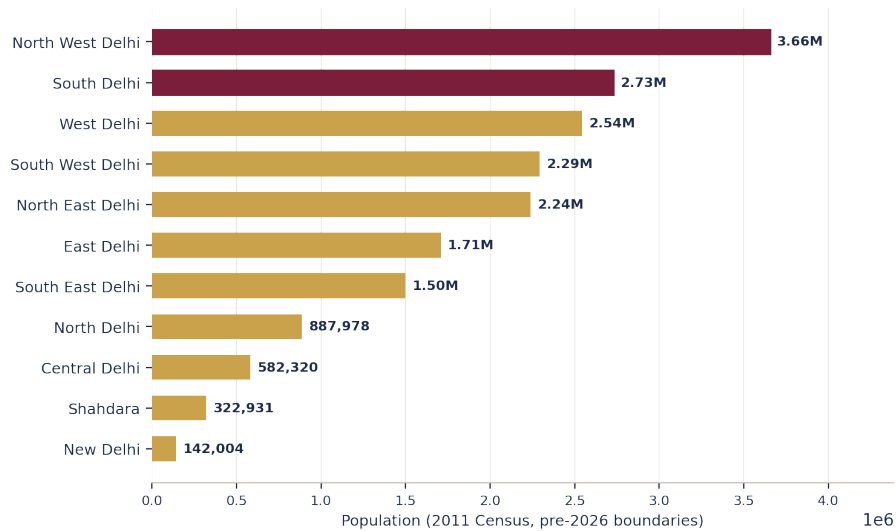


Figure 1 — Population by district, 2011 Census boundaries (pre-2026 reorganization)

The 13 Current Districts (effective January 2026)

District	Key sub-divisions / landmarks
Central Delhi	Patel Nagar, Karol Bagh
Central North Delhi (new)	Shakur Basti, Shalimar Bagh, Model Town
East Delhi	Gandhi Nagar, Vishwas Nagar, Patparganj
New Delhi	Lutyens' Delhi, Delhi Cantonment, Rashtrapati Bhavan
North Delhi	Burari, Adarsh Nagar, Badli
North East Delhi	Karawal Nagar, Gokal Puri, Yamuna Vihar (absorbs former Shahdara)
North West Delhi	Kirari, Nangloi Jat, Rohini Sub-City — Delhi's most populous district
Old Delhi (new)	Sadar Bazar, Chandni Chowk, Shahjahanabad's historic core
Outer North Delhi (new)	Mundka, Narela, Bawana
South Delhi	Chhatarpur, Malviya Nagar, Deoli, Mehrauli, Qutub Minar
South East Delhi	Jangpura, Kalkaji, Badarpur, Nehru Place
South West Delhi	Najafgarh, Matiala, Dwarka Sub-City, IGI Airport
West Delhi	Vikaspuri, Janakpuri, Rajouri Garden

Detailed District Profiles (2011 Census, prior 11-district structure)

The most granular authoritative demographic data available still reflects the 11-district structure that stood from 2012-2025; the profiles below map onto today's 13 districts as noted.

Central Delhi

SPLIT INTO CENTRAL / OLD DELHI / CENTRAL NORTH

HQ Daryaganj. Population 582,320 (2011); area 25 km²; density 23,149/km² — among the densest in the city; literacy 85.25%; sex ratio 892; population declined 10.5% between 2001-2011 as residents moved to newer suburbs. Contains Old Delhi/Shahjahanabad, the Khari Baoli spice market, and Karol Bagh's shopping district.

North Delhi

SPLIT INTO NORTH / OUTER NORTH

HQ Alipur. Population 887,978 (original boundary); density 14,973/km²; literacy 86.81%; sex ratio 871; grew 13% in the 2000s. Encompasses Model Town, Narela, and Alipur on the Haryana border.

North East Delhi

NOW ABSORBS FORMER SHAHDARA

HQ Nand Nagri. Area 62 km²; population 2,241,624; density 36,155/km² — the highest of any Delhi district; literacy 83.09%; sex ratio 886; grew nearly 27% in the 2000s; 68.2% Hindu, 29.3% Muslim. Includes Karawal Nagar, Seelampur, and Dilshad Garden.

North West Delhi

DELHI'S MOST POPULOUS DISTRICT

HQ Kanjhawala. Area 442.8 km² (2nd-largest); population 3,656,539 — the highest of any district; density 8,298/km²; literacy 84.66%; grew 27.6% in the 2000s. Home to the Rohini Sub-City and Saraswati Vihar.

East Delhi

HQ Preet Vihar. Area 64 km²; population 1,709,346; density 27,132/km²; literacy 88.75%; grew nearly 17%; 82.5% Hindu, 10.5% Muslim. Home to the Akshardham Temple, GTB Hospital, and the Laxmi Nagar/Gandhi Nagar wholesale garment market.

New Delhi

Founded 1997, enlarged 2012. Area 35 km²; population fell from 179,112 (2001) to 142,004 (2011) as the district is dominated by government land use rather than housing. Contains Lutyens' Delhi, Rashtrapati Bhavan, Parliament House, and Chanakyapuri's diplomatic enclave.

South Delhi LARGEST OF THE 11 BY AREA

HQ Saket. Area 250 km²; population 2,731,929; density 10,935/km²; grew 20.6%; 78.8% Hindu, 16.3% Muslim, 2.5% Sikh. Home to the Qutub Minar (UNESCO World Heritage Site), IIT Delhi, AIIMS, Saket and Greater Kailash, plus roughly 20% green cover including the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary (Chapter 12).

South East Delhi

Created 2012 from South, New, and East Delhi. HQ Defence Colony; area 102 km²; estimated population ~1.5 million (postdates the 2011 Census, so no independent count exists). Home to Nehru Place, Lajpat Nagar, and Defence Colony.

South West Delhi LARGEST DISTRICT BY AREA

Created January 1997. HQ Kapashera (originally Palam). Area 420 km²; population 2,292,958; density just 5,445/km² — the lowest in Delhi; literacy 88.81%; grew 30.6% in the 2000s, the fastest of any district. Home to the Dwarka Sub-City, Najafgarh, and Indira Gandhi International Airport.

West Delhi

HQ Rajouri Garden. Area 129 km²; population 2,543,243; density 19,625/km²; literacy 87.12%; Punjabis make up more than 60% of the population, a legacy of 1947 Partition resettlement. Home to Janakpuri, Uttam Nagar, and Punjabi Bagh.

Shahdara DISSOLVED JANUARY 2026

Formed September 2012, HQ Nand Nagri; population 322,931 (2011); density 59,703/km² — the highest ever recorded in a Delhi district. 63.8% Hindu, 30.7% Muslim. Historically a hub of 18th-century grain warehouses supplying Old Delhi's Paharganj market; now absorbed into North East and East Delhi.

Population & Demographics

Delhi's population has grown roughly a hundredfold since 1901 — from about 214,000 to more than 21 million today — making it one of the fastest-growing large urban regions in world history, and one of the most densely packed.

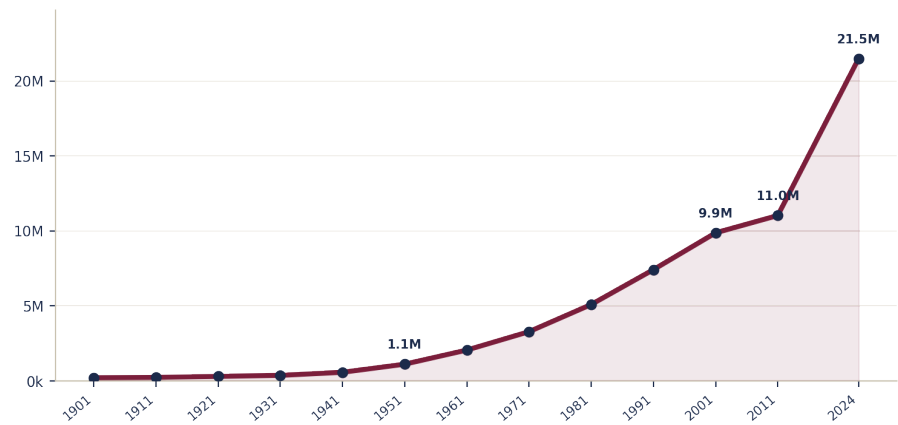


Figure 2 — Delhi (city proper / Megacity) population, 1901–2024 (Census of India; 2024 NCT estimate)

21.5M

NCT POPULATION, 2024 EST.

11,297 /km²

POPULATION DENSITY, 2011

866

SEX RATIO (F PER 1000 M)

86.2%

LITERACY RATE

97.5%

URBAN POPULATION SHARE

28.5M

WIDER URBAN AGGLOMERATION
(2018)

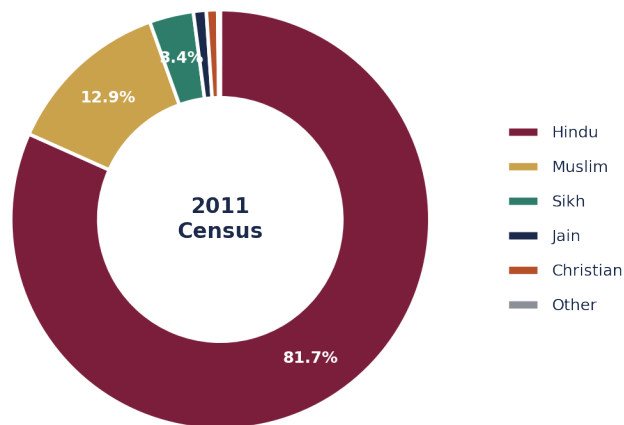


Figure 3 — Religious composition, 2011 Census

Language

Hindi is spoken by 81.3% of residents, followed by Punjabi (5.2%), Urdu (5.2%), Bhojpuri (1.4%), and Bengali (1.3%), with smaller shares of Tamil, Malayalam, Gujarati, and other Indian languages reflecting migration from across the country. Hindi is the official language, with Urdu and Punjabi as additional official languages.

Migration

Delhi recorded the second-highest net inter-state in-migration of any Indian state or UT — roughly 1.7 million net migrants — behind only Maharashtra. In 2001 alone, migration added more population than natural growth (285,000 vs. 215,000).

Roughly 97.5% of Delhi's population is urban, compared with a 31% national average, and its housing stock has not kept pace: as of a 2012 Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) report, an estimated 49% of residents lived in slums or unauthorized colonies without full civic amenities, with about 22% of those residents practicing open defecation. The wider National Capital Region — Delhi plus 23 surrounding districts of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan — spans 55,083 km² and held 58.16 million people in the 2011 Census, with the core urban agglomeration (Delhi plus Gurugram, Noida, Faridabad, and Ghaziabad) estimated at over 28 million by 2018, making it one of the two or three largest metropolitan regions on Earth.

“Delhi's population grew more between 1941 and 1951 (from 579,000 to 1.12 million, +93%) than in almost any other decade in its recorded history — a single-decade surge driven overwhelmingly by Partition refugees.

SOURCE: CENSUS OF INDIA, HISTORICAL POPULATION SERIES

Culture, Festivals & Cuisine

Seven successive capitals left Delhi with a culture built from layers rather than a single tradition — Mughal court refinement, Punjabi Partition resilience, and Sufi syncretism all still visible in its festivals and, especially, its food.

Festivals. Phool Walon Ki Sair ("procession of the florists") is Delhi's clearest expression of composite culture: a three-day festival held every September in Mehrauli, originating in 1812 under Mughal emperor Akbar Shah II and revived by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1962. A procession led by shehnai players carries giant floral fans (pankhas) to both the Hindu shrine of Yogmaya Temple and the dargah of 13th-century Sufi saint Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, celebrated by Hindus and Muslims alike. The Qutub Festival stages three days of Indian classical music and dance against the backdrop of the Qutub Minar, while the annual Republic Day Parade down Rajpath and Ramlila performances staged near the Red Fort each autumn draw crowds on a different, civic-and-devotional register entirely.

Cuisine. Old Delhi's Chandni Chowk is widely regarded as India's street-food capital: chaat in its many forms (aloo tikki, papdi chaat, dahi bhalla) originated in and around these lanes, while Paranthe Wali Gali — a single alley where stuffed-paratha shops have operated since the 1870s — still serves potato, paneer, lentil, and even sweet-filled parathas with chutneys and pickles. Delhi's most globally famous culinary export, butter chicken (murgh makhani), was invented in the 1950s at Moti Mahal in Daryaganj by Kundan Lal Gujral, a Peshawar-born restaurateur whose tandoor techniques — developed after Partition forced him to rebuild his business in Delhi — also gave the city dal makhani and tandoori chicken as we know them today. This Partition-refugee imprint runs deeper than any single dish: Punjabi cooking traditions carried into Delhi by 1947 migrants (Chapter 02) now sit alongside the Mughlai-Awadhi repertoire of Old Delhi's older Kayasth and Muslim khansama families, making "Delhi food" less a single cuisine than a running negotiation between the two.

“Butter chicken and dal makhani — two of the most recognizable dishes of Indian food anywhere in the world — were both invented at a single Daryaganj restaurant by a Partition refugee rebuilding his livelihood from scratch.

SOURCE: MOTI MAHAL, "OUR STORY"

Education & Research Institutions

Delhi hosts the density of top-tier universities and research institutions its status as national capital would predict — and, over the last decade, one of India's most closely watched experiments in reforming government-school education.

86.2%

LITERACY RATE (M 90.9% / F 80.8%)

91

COLLEGES AFFILIATED TO DELHI UNIVERSITY

123rd

IIT DELHI'S QS WORLD RANKING, 2026

2,478

BEDS AT AIIMS DELHI (CHAPTER 10)

Premier institutions. The University of Delhi (founded 1922) enrolls over 130,000 regular students plus roughly 260,000 more through distance learning, across 16 faculties and 91 affiliated colleges spanning six campuses. IIT Delhi (established 1961), an "Institute of Eminence" since 2018, ranks 123rd globally in the QS World University Rankings 2026 and has produced more unicorn-startup founders than any other Indian institution, including the co-founders of Flipkart and Zomato — a detail covered further as part of the city's tech ecosystem in Chapter 10. Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), established 1969, is India's leading center for social-science and international-relations postgraduate research, while Jamia Millia Islamia — founded in 1920 at Aligarh and relocated to Delhi in 1925 — now runs 200+ programs across 9 faculties and holds a NAAC A++ accreditation, consistently ranking among India's top three universities.

The "Delhi Education Revolution." Since 2015, Delhi's government-school system — serving roughly 1.5 million students — has run one of India's most closely tracked education-reform programs, built on three pillars: infrastructure (over \$1.9 billion invested by 2022, including renovating 17,000 classrooms and building 25,000 more), learning quality (the share of students able to do division and read advanced Hindi stories rose 22% across classes 6-8 in a single year, 2018), and accountability through expanded parental engagement via Mohalla Sabhas. Government-school Class 12 pass rates climbed from 88.3% (2019) to 97.6% (2023), and education has consistently taken up roughly a quarter of Delhi's annual budget — an unusually large and sustained fiscal commitment by Indian state standards.

“Delhi has spent roughly a quarter of its annual budget on education for a decade running — among the highest sustained shares of any Indian state or UT — and government-school Class 12 pass rates rose from 88.3% to 97.6% over that period.

SOURCE: EDUCATION NEXT; AAM AADMI PARTY EDUCATION REFORM RECORDS

Cities & Urban Areas

Within the NCT, distinct planned sub-cities and historic quarters give Delhi a patchwork character — from a 17th-century walled city to 1980s master-planned townships. Beyond its own borders, Delhi anchors a National Capital Region of more than 55,000 km² across four states.

New Delhi

The legally distinct municipal core administered by the New Delhi Municipal Council, seat of Rashtrapati Bhavan, Parliament, and the Supreme Court. Area 42.7 km²; 2011 population 249,998. Designed by Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker, foundation laid 1911, inaugurated 1931.

Old Delhi (Shahjahanabad)

The historic walled city built by Shah Jahan (1638-1648), containing the Red Fort, Jama Masjid, and Chandni Chowk. One of Delhi's most densely populated zones, and the commercial heart of North India's wholesale trade.

Dwarka

A South West Delhi sub-city near IGI Airport, billed as Asia's largest planned residential suburb, spanning 1,718 residential enclaves across 29 sectors. Population approaching 1.1-1.2 million at a density around 21,000/km² — among the highest in Delhi. Hosts India's second Diplomatic Enclave and is served by the Airport Express Metro Line.

Rohini

A North West Delhi sub-city developed from the 1980s, population approximately 860,000 with room to grow toward a planned 1.1 million. Served by the Red and Yellow Metro Lines; home to Delhi Technological University.

Narela

Delhi Development Authority's third mega sub-city (after Rohini and Dwarka), near the Haryana border along the historic Grand Trunk Road. The wider Narela sub-district recorded a 2011 population of 809,913, with a comparatively low literacy rate of 70.3% reflecting its role as a post-Partition resettlement area and, more recently, an industrial zone.

South Delhi Neighborhoods — Hauz Khas & Saket

Hauz Khas grew around a 14th-century reservoir complex into a gentrified boutique and restaurant district adjoining IIT Delhi and AIIMS. Saket, the modern district headquarters, hosts five major shopping malls and India's first PVR multiplex, alongside the 14th-century Satpula dam.

The National Capital Region (NCR)

Formed under the NCR Planning Board Act of 1985, the NCR combines Delhi NCT with districts across Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan — 24 districts as of 2021, covering 55,083 km² with a 2011 population of 58.16 million. The four principal satellite cities each grew a distinct economic identity:

City	State	2011 Pop.	Known for
Gurugram (Gurgaon)	Haryana	876,969	"Millennium City" — India's 2nd-largest IT/BPO hub, 250+ Fortune 500 offices
Noida	Uttar Pradesh	637,272	Planned industrial city (est. 1976); IT and mobile manufacturing (Samsung, HCL)
Faridabad	Haryana	1,414,050	Haryana's most populous city; tractors, tyres, garments manufacturing
Ghaziabad	Uttar Pradesh	2,358,525 (UA)	"Gateway of UP"; major rail and industrial hub

All four function as decentralized growth valves for Delhi under the 1985 NCR Act, linked by Delhi Metro and national highways — commuter towns and independent economic centers combined, absorbing much of the IT and heavy-industry growth that Delhi's own land and infrastructure constraints could not accommodate.

The Economy

Delhi punches far above its geographic weight economically: a city-state covering barely 0.05% of India's land area generates almost 5% of national GDP, with a services sector so dominant it now accounts for 85 cents of every rupee produced.

₹11.07L Cr

GSDP, 2023-24 (~US\$130B)

7.4%

REAL GSDP GROWTH, 2023-24

₹5,12,131

PER-CAPITA INCOME, 2023-24

4.94%

SHARE OF INDIA'S TOTAL GDP

6.3-6.6%

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, 2020-21

40.8%

WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION
(BELOW 50.5% NATIONAL AVG.)

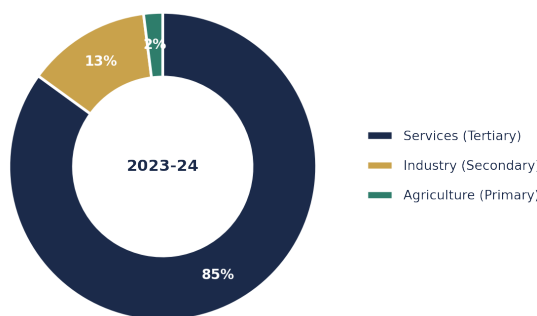


Figure 4 — GSDP by sector, 2023-24 (PRS/Economic Survey of Delhi)

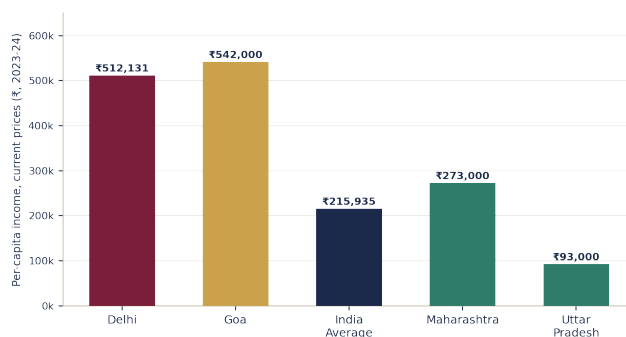


Figure 5 — Per-capita income comparison, 2023-24 (current prices)

Delhi's per-capita income has consistently ranked among the top two or three of all Indian states and union territories, trailing only Goa in most recent comparisons — at roughly 2.4 times the national average. The structural shift toward services has been dramatic: as recently as 2005-06, the tertiary sector made up about 71% of GSDP; by 2023-24 that share had climbed to 85%, with industry contributing 13% and agriculture just 2%. Government and quasi-government employment remains outsized relative to other Indian cities — an estimated 594,000 workers in 2018, versus 273,000 in the formally tracked private sector — a legacy of Delhi's role as the seat of national government.

The city's fiscal position has swung sharply in recent years: after posting a surplus equal to 0.4% of GSDP in 2022-23, Delhi's 2025-26 budget (presented March 2025) projected a fiscal deficit of

₹13,703 crore against total planned expenditure of ₹95,358 crore — a roughly eightfold jump in deficit, driven partly by new welfare spending including a ₹2,500/month cash-transfer scheme for women (₹5,100 crore allocated) and expanded health insurance coverage.

“Delhi's workforce participation rate — just 40.8% of residents aged 15 and over — trails the national average of 50.5%, even as its per-capita income outpaces nearly every other Indian state.

SOURCE: PRS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, DELHI BUDGET ANALYSIS 2025-26

Industries & What Drives Them

Delhi's economy layers a centuries-old wholesale trading culture over a modern services and government economy, with pockets of manufacturing, a booming logistics sector, and an informal economy that may employ as many people as the formal one.

1 Trade & Wholesale Commerce HISTORIC BACKBONE

Delhi is the largest commercial centre in northern India, and its Old Delhi markets remain the country's wholesale trading backbone. Chandni Chowk, built in 1650 by Shah Jahan as a half-moon bazaar of 1,560 shops, still anchors specialized sub-markets: Dariba Kalan for gold and silver jewellery, Kucha Mahajani as one of Asia's biggest gold-trading hubs, Bhagirath Palace for electrical goods and lighting, Nai Sarak for stationery and paper, and Khari Baoli — one of Asia's largest spice markets. Nearby Sadar Bazaar is widely considered India's largest wholesale market, with estimated daily transactions exceeding ₹300 crore, while Okhla Mandi handles wholesale fruit and vegetables. Delhi's retail sector overall is one of India's largest and fastest-growing, powered by a large, high-disposable-income consumer base and the city's role as a redistribution hub for goods moving across North India.

2 IT & Technology Services SPILLS INTO NCR

IT/ITES is a named priority under Delhi's Industrial Policy, and the city hosts operations for Google India, TCS, HCL Technologies, SAP Labs India, and Teleperformance, with Nehru Place functioning as Delhi's own electronics and IT commercial hub. However, the sector's center of gravity has shifted to NCR satellite cities — Gurugram and Noida in particular — which offer newer infrastructure and larger campuses, drawing hundreds of thousands of Delhi residents into daily cross-border commutes for IT and business-process jobs.

3 Government & Public Administration STRUCTURAL ANCHOR

As both national and territorial capital (its governance structure covered in full in Chapter 03), Delhi carries an outsized government employment base — an estimated 594,000 national, state, and quasi-government workers in 2018 versus 273,000 in the formally tracked private sector. Delhi also hosts the vast majority of India's foreign embassies and high commissions, concentrated in the Chanakypuri diplomatic enclave, sustaining demand for high-end real estate, hospitality, and professional services around Lutyens' Delhi and Connaught Place.

4 **Tourism & Heritage** **5.6% OF CITY GDP**

Delhi holds three UNESCO World Heritage Sites — the Red Fort, Qutub Minar (begun c. 1192, completed 1220), and Humayun's Tomb (commissioned 1569) — alongside 1,200 heritage buildings and 175 nationally protected monuments recognized by the Archaeological Survey of India. An estimated 62% of all tourists and NRIs visiting India pass through Delhi. Per the World Travel & Tourism Council, tourism generated US\$3.2 billion (3.6% of city GDP) in 2016 and supported 460,300 jobs, with growth projected to push the sector to US\$8.9 billion by 2026. Major recurring draws include the biennial Auto Expo, the New Delhi World Book Fair, and the India International Trade Fair, which alone attracts more than 1.5 million visitors each November.

5 **Manufacturing Clusters** **DECLINING BUT PERSISTENT**

Dedicated industrial estates carry Delhi's manufacturing base. Okhla Industrial Estate (established 1952, inaugurated 1958) now hosts garment and leather exporters, pharmaceutical units, and plastics/packaging manufacturers. Mayapuri (West Delhi), after losing most of its heavy-metal industry to environmental sanctions, evolved into arguably India's biggest market for used automotive and industrial spare parts. Bawana (North West Delhi) has converted agricultural land into a government-developed industrial zone alongside a 1,500 MW gas power plant. As of the last detailed count, Delhi's manufacturing sector employed 1.44 million workers across 129,000 industrial units — though the sector's GSDP share has steadily shrunk as services have grown.

6 **Logistics & E-Commerce** **NORTH INDIA'S GATEWAY**

Indira Gandhi International Airport is India's busiest, handling over 48 million passengers in 2015-16 and roughly 34.5% of all trade transacted through India's major airports; its Terminal 3, built 2007-2010 at a cost of US\$1.1 billion, remains one of the world's award-winning terminals. Delhi has India's highest road density (2,103 km per 100 km²) and sits at the junction of five National Highways — the full transport network, including the Metro's current scale, is covered in Chapter 11. This road and air network makes NCR one of India's largest e-commerce warehousing and fulfillment hubs, with major distribution centers clustering along expressway corridors in Gurugram and Manesar.

7 Education & Healthcare Hub

NORTH INDIA'S REFERRAL CENTER

Delhi's university system — Delhi University, IIT Delhi, JNU, and Jamia Millia Islamia — is covered in full in Chapter 07. On healthcare specifically, AIIMS Delhi (founded 1956) is India's premier public medical institution, with 2,478 beds handling roughly 4.36 million outpatient visits and 245,565 admissions a year — a referral hospital whose reach extends across North India, reinforced by a dedicated air-ambulance heliport for patients flown in from remote regions.

8 Informal & Gig Economy

POSSIBLY HALF THE WORKFORCE

India's informal sector accounts for over 80% of non-agricultural employment nationally — among the highest shares in the world — and Delhi is no exception. The clearest local proxy is housing: an estimated 49% of Delhi's population lived in slums or unauthorized colonies as of 2012, a population disproportionately dependent on informal work such as street vending, domestic work, construction labor, and portering. Street vending is woven into Delhi's oldest commercial districts — Chandni Chowk's lanes have always teemed with peddlers and street food sellers (Chapter 06) — while a newer, largely uncounted layer of gig-economy delivery and ride-hailing workers has emerged alongside India's e-commerce boom, though comprehensive Delhi-specific statistics on this workforce remain limited.

Transport & Connectivity

Delhi has been a railway crossroads since 1864 and a metro city only since 2002 — yet the metro network built in that short span has grown faster than the road network it was built to relieve.

374 km

DELHI METRO NETWORK, 271 STATIONS, 10 LINES

2,103 km

ROAD DENSITY PER 100 KM² — INDIA'S HIGHEST

79.26M

IGI AIRPORT PASSENGERS, FY2024-25

1864

OLD DELHI JUNCTION OPENED — THE CITY'S OLDEST STATION

Rail: a 160-year-old crossroads. Old Delhi Junction, opened in 1864 when the line from Calcutta first reached the city, is Delhi's oldest railway station; branch lines toward Mathura, Ambala, and Rewari followed within a few years, cementing Delhi's role as a rail crossroads that persists today — around 250 trains a day still originate, terminate, or pass through the station. That legacy rail network now carries the Delhi Metro, whose Red Line (Shahdara–Tis Hazari, 8.4 km) opened on 24 December 2002. From that single line, the network has grown to 10 colour-coded lines, 271 stations, and 374 km of track carrying 6.46 million riders daily — and Phase IV, under construction since December 2019, will add a further 65+ km toward a network exceeding 450 km. The Delhi–Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System ("Namo Bharat"), an 82 km, 16-station corridor reaching 180 km/h, had 55 km operational as of January 2025, running behind its original September 2025 completion target (Chapter 14).

Roads and air. Delhi's road density of 2,103 km per 100 km² is the highest of any Indian state or UT, and the city sits at the junction of five National Highways, including the starting points of the Golden Quadrilateral's Delhi–Mumbai and Delhi–Kolkata legs — with the new Delhi–Mumbai Expressway (1,350 km total, 756 km operational by April 2025) and the Dwarka Expressway (27.6 km, fully operational since August 2025) both cutting travel times further. Three Inter-State Bus Terminals — Kashmere Gate, Anand Vihar, and Sarai Kale Khan — anchor long-distance bus travel, with Kashmere Gate ISBT (the oldest, operational since 1976 as Maharana Pratap ISBT) sitting at the junction of NH24 and the Ring Road. Indira Gandhi International Airport handled 79.26 million passengers in FY2024-25 — the ninth-busiest airport in the world — and is India's single busiest airport by both passenger and cargo volume.

“Delhi's Metro carries 6.46 million riders a day — more than the entire population of Denmark — on a network built from a single 8.4 km line in barely two decades.

SOURCE: DELHI METRO RAIL CORPORATION

Environment, Wildlife & Biodiversity

Beneath the pollution crisis covered in Chapter 13 sits a quieter story: Delhi's green cover has actually been expanding, and the Aravalli ridge running through its south still shelters a working wildlife sanctuary inside city limits.

13.17%

FOREST COVER, 2023 (UP FROM 12.73% IN 2015)

11.87%

TREE COVER, 2023 (UP FROM 7.49% IN 2015)

32.71 km²

ASOLA BHATTI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

1959

NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK ESTABLISHED

Green cover is growing, unevenly. Delhi's forest cover rose from 12.73% of its geographical area in 2015 to 13.17% in 2023 (India State of Forest Report), while tree cover outside recorded forest — parks, avenue plantations, institutional campuses — grew faster still, from 7.49% to 11.87% over the same period. Together, roughly a quarter of the NCT now carries some form of green cover, concentrated overwhelmingly along the Delhi Ridge (Chapter 04) and the Yamuna floodplain rather than spread evenly across the city.

Asola Bhatti and the biodiversity parks. The Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary, spanning 32.71 km² on the southern Delhi Ridge along the Haryana border, is the NCT's only wildlife sanctuary — a fragment of Aravalli dry-deciduous and thorn forest home to native trees like Dhau, Ronjh, Kikar, and Palash, alongside nilgai, jackal, and a wide range of resident and migratory birds. It sits within a wider constellation of restoration projects: the Yamuna Biodiversity Park and Aravalli Biodiversity Park (both ecological-restoration initiatives rebuilding native floodplain and ridge habitats respectively) and the smaller Tilpath Valley Biodiversity Park, a 172-acre site inaugurated in February 2018 as Delhi's third biodiversity park. Delhi's National Zoological Park, a 176-acre facility first proposed in 1951 and opened in November 1959, was formally renamed and repositioned as a model institution for other Indian zoos in 1982.

The competing pressure. None of this offsets the air-quality crisis detailed in the next chapter — *Prosopis juliflora*, an invasive, low-ecological-value species, remains Delhi's single most abundant tree by count, a sign that raw percentage gains in tree cover do not automatically translate into high-quality habitat. Balancing further green-cover expansion against continued urban land pressure, and doing so with ecologically useful native species rather than fast-growing invasives, is likely to shape how much of Delhi's reported tree-cover growth holds up as genuine ecological gain.

“Delhi's tree cover has grown faster than its forest cover over the last decade — from 7.49% to 11.87% of the NCT's area — even as the city's air quality crisis (Chapter 13) has worsened over the same period.

SOURCE: INDIA STATE OF FOREST REPORT, 2015 & 2023

Problems Facing Delhi

Delhi's economic success has outrun its infrastructure. Air pollution, traffic, water stress, waste, and informal housing now threaten the same growth that produced them.

Air Pollution — the defining crisis

Delhi has repeatedly topped the World Air Quality Report's ranking of the world's most polluted capital city, with AQI hitting 1,200 on 12 November 2024. During the November 2016 "Great Smog of Delhi," PM2.5 and PM10 both pegged monitoring stations at their maximum reading of 999 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, against safe limits of 60 and 100 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ respectively. WHO data show Delhi's annual mean PM2.5 ranged from 105-237 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ between 2010 and 2020 — more than 21 times the WHO guideline of 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in the 2020 average. Source apportionment studies attribute roughly 41% of pollution to vehicles, 21.5% to dust, and 18% to industry, with stubble burning from neighboring states spiking to 45% of the pollution load during peak season. The health toll is severe: pollution is estimated to cut average life expectancy in Delhi by about 10 years, contribute to roughly 10,500 deaths annually, and has left an estimated 2.2 million children with irreversible lung damage.

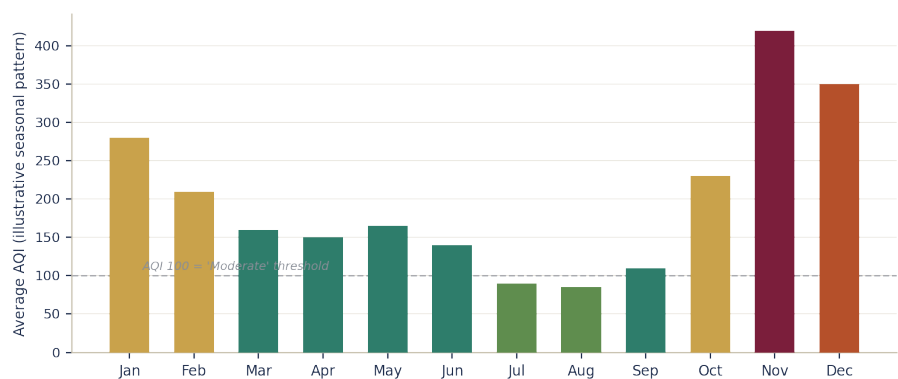


Figure 6 — Illustrative seasonal AQI pattern, reflecting Delhi's documented winter pollution spikes

Traffic Congestion

Registered vehicles in Delhi passed 10 million by mid-2017, on a road network that already has India's highest road density. Even with the Metro carrying 6.46 million riders a day and buses another 4.19 million, private vehicle growth continues to outstrip road capacity, particularly on ring roads and NCR commuter corridors.

Water Scarcity & Yamuna Pollution

The Delhi Jal Board supplies about 900 million gallons per day, with up to half of actual usage drawn from unregulated groundwater. A single 22-kilometre stretch of the Yamuna between Wazirabad and Okhla — under 2% of the river's length — is responsible for an estimated 80% of its total pollution load, fed by 15 major drains carrying 800 million litres of untreated sewage and 44 million litres of industrial effluent daily; only about 35% of sewage receives treatment, and 22 of Delhi's 35 sewage treatment plants fail state pollution-control standards. Toxic foam on the river's surface during religious bathing festivals has become a recurring, internationally covered embarrassment.

Waste Management

Delhi generates roughly 8,000 tonnes of solid waste daily across three landfill sites, all of which have long exceeded safe capacity. Ghazipur landfill stands 65 metres tall with an estimated 8.5 million tonnes of legacy waste remaining as of March 2025 (a major fire broke out there in April 2024); Bhalswa stands over 62 metres and still receives more than 2,300 tonnes a day; Okhla reached 55 metres — three times its permissible height — before being decommissioned in 2018. For scale, Ghazipur's mound is now nearly as tall as the Qutub Minar itself.

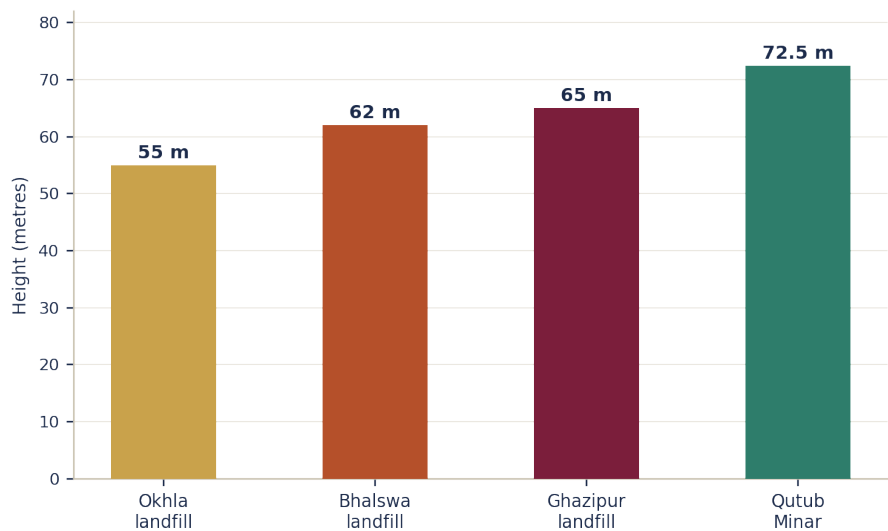


Figure 7 — Delhi's landfill mounds compared to the Qutub Minar (72.5m)

Housing & Informal Settlements

An estimated 49% of Delhi's population lived in slums or unauthorized colonies as of a 2012 DUSIB assessment, with about 22% of those residents practicing open defecation for lack of sanitation infrastructure. Commonly cited figures put the number of unauthorized colonies above 1,700 and JJ (jhuggi-jhopdi) clusters above 675, though current official counts should be verified against DDA/MCD primary sources.

Labor Market Strain & Urban Heat

Delhi's workforce participation rate (40.8%) trails the national average (50.5%), even as unemployment hovers around 6.3-6.6%. The city also experiences a pronounced urban heat island effect — 1-6°C hotter than surrounding rural areas — compounding heat-wave risk in a city that has recorded temperatures as high as 47.2°C.

Solutions & Policy Responses

Delhi has run more large-scale urban policy experiments than almost any Indian city — with mixed but instructive results.

Odd-Even Vehicle Rationing

First launched 1 January 2016 and run intermittently since (most recently as an available Stage IV measure under the Graded Response Action Plan), the scheme restricts private cars to alternate days based on odd/even license plate numbers during high-pollution episodes.

Electric Vehicles & E-Buses

Delhi's public transport fleet now includes over 1,250 electric buses within a 4,359-bus DTC fleet — already the world's largest CNG bus operation — with a further 839 e-buses added via DIMTS in October 2025, giving Delhi India's largest e-bus fleet.

Metro Expansion

The Delhi Metro has grown to 10 lines, 271 stations, and 374 km of track (Chapter 11), carrying 6.46 million riders daily. Phase IV, approved in 2019 and covering 103 km across 6 new lines, will push the network past 450 km on completion.

Yamuna Rejuvenation

The Yamuna Action Plan has run in three phases since 1993 with Japanese development financing; a new "Yamuna Master Plan" announced in February 2025 sets a 2027 cleanup deadline, including 40 new decentralized sewage treatment plants backed by ₹500 crore in the 2025-26 budget.

Waste-to-Energy

The Timarpur-Okhla plant, operating since January 2012, was India's first waste-to-energy facility, processing 2,000 tonnes of waste daily to generate 16 MW of power. A new waste-to-energy plant for the Ghazipur site was tendered in July 2025.

Slum Redevelopment

The Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board, established in 2010, runs in-situ rehabilitation programs alongside the Delhi Development Authority; the redevelopment of Kathputli Colony — a public-private partnership rehousing roughly 2,800 families — stands as the flagship case study, though it has faced significant implementation delays.

GRAP — Graded Response Action Plan

Administered by the Commission for Air Quality Management (established October 2020), GRAP applies four escalating stages of restriction based on measured AQI: Stage I (201-300, "Poor") triggers dust control; Stage II (301-400) adds parking fees; Stage III (401-450) bans older vehicles and non-BS-compliant construction equipment; Stage IV (above 450, "Severe Plus") triggers truck bans, odd-even rationing, and school closures.

Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS)

The Delhi-Meerut RRTS corridor ("Namo Bharat"), 82 km across 16 stations at a cost of ₹30,274 crore, reaches speeds up to 180 km/h. As of January 2025, 55 km were operational, with full completion running behind the original September 2025 target.

What Delhi Can Learn From Other Global Cities

Every major problem in this report has already been solved, at least partially, somewhere else. The case studies below pair Delhi's challenges with real precedents — and concrete numbers.

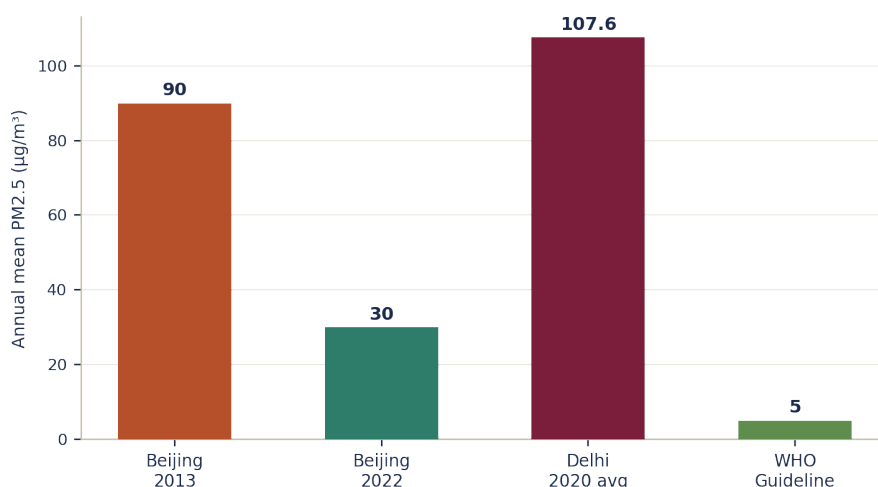


Figure 8 — Beijing's PM2.5 reduction vs. Delhi and the WHO guideline (µg/m³, annual mean)

B Beijing — Air Pollution Cleanup

Beijing's smog peaked in January 2013 with AQI readings over 300 (some monitors hit 700+). After declaring a "war on pollution" in 2014 — coal-to-gas conversion, industrial relocation, and vehicle restrictions — PM2.5 fell 35% in 2017 alone and reached 30 µg/m³ by 2022, the best air quality since 2013. Heavily polluted days fell from 58 in 2013 to just 2 in 2024, a 96.6% reduction, all while GDP growth held at 6.9-7.7%.

Lesson for Delhi: a time-bound, hard-mandate fuel-switching and industrial-relocation program can cut PM2.5 by two-thirds within a decade without stalling economic growth.

S **Seoul — Cheonggyecheon Stream Restoration**

In 2003, Seoul tore down an elevated expressway built over a buried stream and restored 10.9 km of open waterway by September 2005, at a cost of roughly US\$281 million. Despite removing a major road, downtown vehicle entries fell 2.3% while subway ridership rose 4.3%; air pollution along the corridor dropped 35%, summer temperatures near the stream ran 3.3-5.9°C cooler than parallel roads, and fish species rebounded from 4 to 25.

Lesson for Delhi: uncovering and restoring a car-dominated, polluted waterway corridor — directly analogous to the Yamuna's urban stretch — can fix flooding, heat, and traffic simultaneously, not just aesthetics.

S **Singapore — Vehicle Quotas & Water Reuse**

Singapore's Certificate of Entitlement system, launched in 1990, has held personal vehicle population growth at zero since February 2018, reinforced by electronic road pricing. Its NEWater program treats wastewater to potable standard through microfiltration, reverse osmosis, and UV treatment; five plants now supply 40% of Singapore's water demand, targeting 55% by 2060.

Lesson for Delhi: a hard vehicle-growth cap paired with treated-wastewater reuse could address congestion and the city's chronic water shortage at the same time.

L **London — Congestion Charge & ULEZ**

London's Congestion Charge launched in February 2003 at £5/day, rising to £18 by 2026; net revenue is legally required to be reinvested in transport infrastructure, generating roughly £2.6 billion cumulatively between 2003-2013. The Ultra Low Emission Zone, introduced in 2019, has been shown to reduce both driving and pollution on charged and adjacent roads.

Lesson for Delhi: a legally ring-fenced congestion charge — revenue mandated for transit reinvestment, not general funds — is a self-financing model for expanding public transport while cutting traffic.

C Bogotá — Bus Rapid Transit (TransMilenio)

Opened in December 2000 at roughly US\$5.85 million per km — a fraction of metro-rail cost — TransMilenio cut a 30 km, 2-hour-15-minute bus trip down to 55 minutes by 2008. Daily ridership grew from 800,000 at launch to 2.4 million by 2018, though the system has also faced serious overcrowding and maintenance criticism.

Lesson for Delhi: dedicated-lane BRT can deliver near-metro speed at a fraction of the cost and can be built in years rather than decades — provided capacity keeps pace with ridership.

C Copenhagen — Cycling Infrastructure

Copenhagen's 2002-2012 Cycle Policy set explicit numeric targets — raising cycling's commute mode share from 34% to 40% while cutting serious injuries by half — backed by roughly 350 km of physically separated (not painted) bike lanes and dedicated "Cycle Super Highways" linking suburbs to the center. The city calculates that every kilometre cycled nets society 1.22 Danish kroner, versus a net loss of 0.69 kroner per kilometre driven.

Lesson for Delhi: physically separated bike lanes plus published, numeric multi-year targets — not vague promotion campaigns — are what drove Copenhagen's shift, and could be piloted on a handful of arterial corridors.

T Tokyo — Waste Management

Japan's 1970 "Pollution Diet" passed 14 environmental laws in a single session, transforming waste policy nationally. Tokyo relies heavily on incineration — a typical facility processes 600 tonnes a day, serving about 600,000 people — with ash used for land reclamation in Tokyo Bay. Japan's resource-recycling rate nearly doubled from 8.2% (1994) to 15.8% (2014), with legally mandated household sorting into as many as 30 categories.

Lesson for Delhi: waste-to-energy incineration paired with legally mandated, multi-category sorting — not voluntary segregation — is what let space-constrained Tokyo shrink its landfill dependency, directly relevant to the Ghazipur/Bhalswa/Okhla crisis.

M Medellín & Singapore — Integrating Informal Settlements

Medellín's Metrocable gondola system, opened in 2004 for roughly US\$26 million over 2 km, connected steep hillside slums to the metro network, cutting commutes that once took 2.5 hours each way — and has been linked in peer-reviewed research to measurable reductions in neighborhood violence. Singapore's Housing & Development Board, formed in 1960, cleared informal kampongs (home to roughly a quarter of the urban population) and built subsidized, ownership-oriented public housing at scale; nearly 80% of Singaporeans now live in HDB flats, most of which they own.

Lesson for Delhi: cheap point-to-point transit (cable cars) can integrate hard-to-reach unauthorized colonies without costly relocation, while Singapore shows that ownership-oriented — not just rental — public housing is what converts informal settlements into stable communities.

Future Growth & Potential

Delhi's planners are betting on transit-oriented density to absorb another decade of growth — even as the city's population is projected to climb well past 30 million.

30.8M

PROJECTED NCT POPULATION BY
2041

100%

URBAN BY 2031 (MASTER PLAN
TARGET)

₹13.27T

ESTIMATED GSDP, 2025-26

79.26M

IGI AIRPORT PASSENGERS, FY2024-25

Master Plan Delhi 2041

The Master Plan for Delhi 2041 projects the NCT's population rising to 30.8 million by 2041, up from 20.5 million in 2021, with the territory reaching 100% urbanization by 2031. Its core planning strategy centers on transit-oriented development (TOD): higher floor-area ratios (400+) within 0.5-2 km of metro and RRTS corridors, aimed at concentrating growth around transit rather than continuing outward sprawl, alongside an explicit slum-free target that will require the housing and redevelopment programs described in Chapter 14 to scale substantially.

Economic Trajectory

Delhi's GSDP is estimated to reach ₹13.27 trillion (roughly US\$157 billion) in 2025-26, continuing a run of nominal growth that outpaced the national average in recent years, with per-capita income projected near ₹593,071 (about US\$7,015). Oxford Economics has ranked Delhi 108th among global cities by economic output — and the best-performing Indian city on that measure — reflecting sustained momentum even as growth has moderated slightly in real terms.

Infrastructure Pipeline

Several major projects are reshaping Delhi's connectivity, expanding on the network described in Chapter 11: the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway (1,350 km total, 756 km operational by April 2025, full completion targeted around 2027) and the Dwarka Expressway (27.6 km, fully operational since August 2025) will substantially cut travel times to Mumbai and Gurugram respectively. IGI Airport handled 79.26 million passengers in FY2024-25 — the ninth-busiest airport in the world — with further expansion planned to eventually reach 100 million passengers annually. Metro Phase IV and the Delhi-Meerut RRTS corridor, both discussed in Chapter 14, will add well over 100 km of new rail transit capacity.

Risks to Sustaining Growth

Delhi's growth model faces real constraints: workforce participation (40.8%) remains below the national average even as the economy grows; water supply (900 MGD, with heavy unmetered groundwater dependence) is already stretched thin; the city sits in Seismic Zone IV; and it has recorded temperatures as high as 47.2°C amid a worsening urban heat island effect. The Yamuna floodplain also carries ongoing flood risk that intensifies as impervious urban surface area continues to expand. Whether Delhi can convert its demographic and economic momentum into genuinely livable, climate-resilient growth — rather than simply larger versions of today's pollution, water, and housing crises — is likely to be the central question of the next two decades.

Notable Facts

-
- ✦ Delhi has been the site of seven successive historic capital cities — from 11th-century Lal Kot to Shah Jahan's 17th-century Shahjahanabad — a claim almost no other city on Earth can make.
-
- ✦ The Qutub Minar, begun in 1192, is still the world's tallest brick minaret at 72.5 metres — nearly as tall as the Ghazipur landfill mound that now looms over East Delhi.
-
- ✦ Delhi's population grew 93% in a single decade (1941-1951), driven almost entirely by an influx of Partition refugees — one of the fastest urban population surges in modern history.
-
- ✦ Delhi contributes 4.94% of India's entire GDP while covering just 0.05% of its land area.
-
- ✦ Per-capita income of ₹5,12,131 is roughly 2.4 times the national average — yet an estimated 49% of Delhi's population lives in slums or unauthorized colonies.
-
- ✦ Butter chicken and dal makhani were both invented at a single Daryaganj restaurant, Moti Mahal, by a Partition refugee rebuilding his livelihood from scratch.
-
- ✦ Delhi's elected government does not control its own police force — one of only a handful of jurisdictions in the democratic world where the capital's local government lacks this power.
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- ✦ A single 22-km stretch of the Yamuna causes 80% of the river's total pollution — less than 2% of its full length.
-
- ✦ Delhi's Ghazipur landfill stands 65 metres tall — nearly as tall as the Qutub Minar — and continues to grow, even as the city's tree cover has grown from 7.49% to 11.87% of its area since 2015.
-
- ✦ IIT Delhi has produced more unicorn-startup founders than any other Indian institution, including the co-founders of Flipkart and Zomato.
-
- ✦ AIIMS Delhi handles roughly 4.36 million outpatient visits a year — more than the entire population of several Indian states — as North India's apex referral hospital.
-
- ✦ Beijing cut its PM2.5 pollution by two-thirds in under a decade through coal-to-gas conversion and industrial relocation — a policy playbook Delhi has yet to fully replicate.
-
- ✦ Delhi's Metro carries 6.46 million riders a day, more than the entire population of Denmark, on a network that has grown from a single 8.4 km line to 374 km since 2002.
-

Sources: Census of India (1901-2011 historical population series; 2011 Census district and demographic data); PRS Legislative Research, "Delhi Budget Analysis 2025-26"; Economic Survey of Delhi; Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (2012 slum/JJ cluster report); Central Pollution Control Board and WHO Ambient Air Quality Database; World Travel & Tourism Council, "City Travel & Tourism Impact 2017 – Delhi"; NCR Planning Board; Master Plan for Delhi 2041 / Delhi Development Authority; Delhi High Court; Supreme Court Observer and PRS Legislative Research on the GNCTD (Amendment) Act, 2021 and 2023 ordinance; Municipal Corporation of Delhi; NIRF 2026 and QS World University Rankings 2026; Education Next and Aam Aadmi Party government-school reform records; India State of Forest Report, 2015 & 2023; Delhi Forest Department; Delhi Metro Rail Corporation; Moti Mahal, "Our Story"; Wikipedia articles on Delhi, History of Delhi, Economy of Delhi, Government of Delhi, and related topics (Old Delhi, New Delhi, Dwarka, Rohini, Narela, Okhla, Mayapuri, Bawana, TransMilenio, Cheonggyecheon, Certificate of Entitlement, NEWater, London congestion charge, Cycling in Copenhagen, Waste management in Japan, Metrocable Medellín, Public housing in Singapore), cross-checked at time of writing (July 2026).

Figures for the newly created Old Delhi, Central North Delhi, and Outer North Delhi districts (effective January 2026) predate published Census-equivalent data and should be treated as provisional. This report is for general informational purposes; figures may be revised in subsequent government data releases.