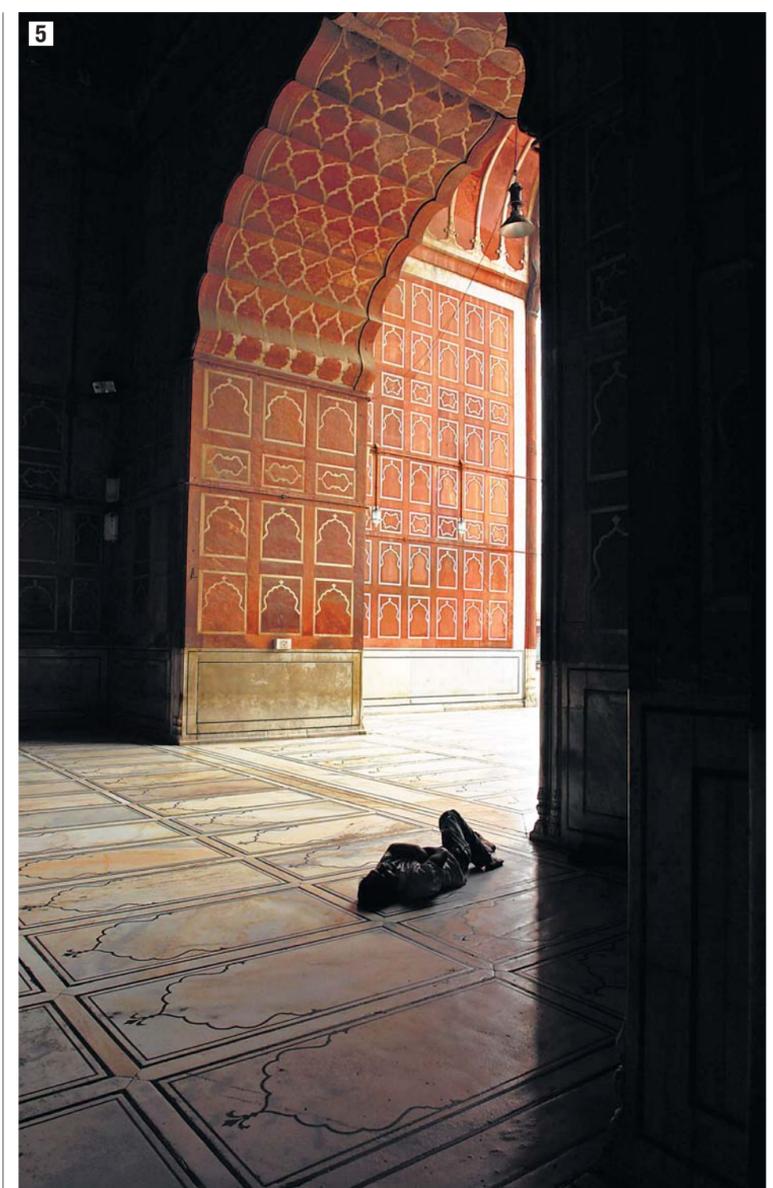
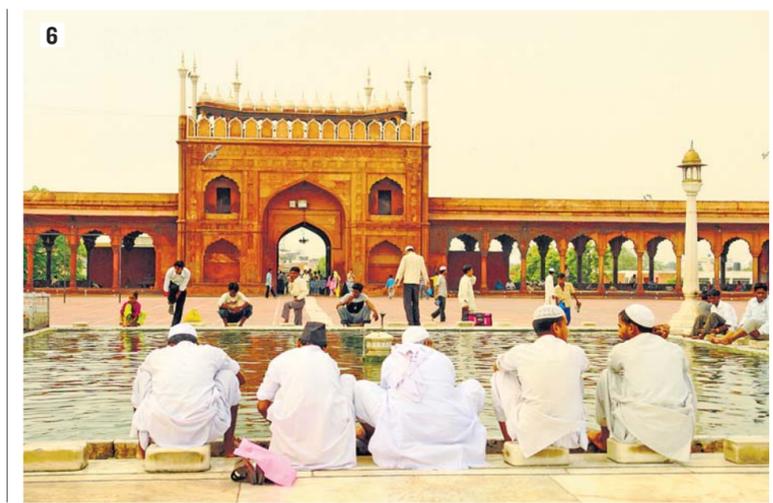


MASJID-I-JAHAN-NUMA
Though commonly called the Jama Masjid, this old Delhi mosque's name is Masjid-i Jahan-Numa.

WHO COMMISSIONED IT
Commissioned by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, it was built in 1656 AD. It is one of the largest and best-known mosques in India.

OLD QURAN
The courtyard of the Jama Masjid can hold up to 25,000 worshippers. It also houses several relics, including an antique copy of the Quran.

ARCHED ENTRANCES
Under the domes, there is a hall with seven arched entrances. The walls around the mosque are covered with marble... up to the height of the waist.



INSIDE JAMA MASJID, EACH INDIVIDUAL SEEMS TO HAVE HIS OWN SPACE, CONSIDERING THE SURROUNDINGS ARE SO CROWDED

A SPACE TO CALL THEIR OWN

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY CHARUKESI RAMADURAI
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It is Sunday morning and the roads leading to Chandni Chowk are deserted. We cross the chaotic merry-go-round of Connaught Place in a trice and head to old Delhi. Where are all the people? The buffaloes that amble through the roads listlessly? The children who dart at unexpected moments across the road? It is so quiet. Where are all the vehicles? There is no orchestra of blaring horns, no tinkle of cycle rickshaw bells as they weave their way through the narrow lanes, just managing to miss running over innocent feet and getting run over by speeding cars. Before I realise it, the Red Fort is to my right, imposing and grey in the early morning light, not fully awake.

And inside the Jama Masjid, the sense of stillness follows us. On an earlier trip late one afternoon a few months ago, I remember the contrast the interiors of Jama Masjid presented to the babel of the streets and market surrounding it. At one of the gates, the cap seller is just taking out his stock, arranging them carefully into a delicate house of cards. He ignores my intrusive camera, shrugging his indifference even when I show him his photographs. I can see he is pleased though; he summons his friend to see them and then calls out to me a few minutes later to share the meagre breakfast of *parathas* they have all carefully carried from home. I stand near the gate that looks on to the Red Fort, sharing the moment with families sitting on the steps. And later, from the top, having made our way up the narrow, winding steps, we see old Delhi

sprawling before us, bursting at the seams. My mind keeps going back to the past, to the place this must have been, to the better days this area has seen. Now, people are washing their clothes on a tiny stream between the mosque and the fort, vendors are setting up shop all along the road, children are running around trying to catch chicken and each other in a game that makes sense only in childhood. Back again on ground level, people are quietly doing their own thing — near the pool in the preliminary cleansing ritual, under the arch staring out blankly into space, on the corridor offering prayer, behind the pillars fast asleep; all outside noises are filtered by the thick red walls along with their worries and anxieties. Inside Jama Masjid, each individual seems to have found his own space.



1 The courtyard filled with pigeons and some playful children; 2 An early Sunday morning at the masjid 3 Around a big square fountain 4 Through the arch 5 Finding peace and sleep inside 6 The preliminary cleansing ritual before one enters the masjid

7 A cap vendor arranges his wares delicately 8 Old Delhi, through the viewfinder 9 There's enough space for one to pray and sleep

My mind keeps going back to the past, to the place this must have been, to the better days this area has seen