REVISITING **MUMBAI**

A City on the Rise

A return to India's financial capital after a decade revealed a city that has quietly transformed itself without losing the energy that makes it unlike anywhere else on Earth.

Some cities make an unforgettable first impression. Others take a little longer to reveal their true character. Mumbai, I have discovered, belongs firmly in the latter camp.

When I first visited India's financial capital around ten years ago, I left with enormous respect for what the city represented. Still, I couldn't pretend it had been an easy place to explore. It was noisy, frenetic, and at times utterly exhausting.



Traffic seemed to move by rules known only to those behind the wheel, pavements overflowed with people, and every outing became an assault on the senses. There was no denying the city's vibrancy, but it demanded your full attention from the moment you arrived.



Returning this year, I expected more of the same. Instead, I found a city that still pulses with the same unmistakable energy, but one that feels noticeably more polished than the Mumbai I remembered. The crowds are still there, the soundtrack of car horns remains ever present, and there is no escaping the fact that this is one of the world's busiest urban centres. Yet beneath the familiar chaos lies something that wasn't nearly as obvious a decade ago: confidence.

Mumbai feels like a city that has grown into itself.





A CITY LOOKING FORWARD

Much of that newfound confidence stems from an extraordinary period of investment. Over the past decade, Mumbai has embarked on one of the most ambitious infrastructure programmes in its history. New Metro lines now reach suburbs once notorious for congestion, the Coastal Road has dramatically improved travel along the western seafront, and new bridges and transport corridors continue to reshape the skyline. The projects remain controversial in some quarters, as developments of this scale often are, but the cumulative effect is impossible to ignore.

The city feels cleaner. Public spaces appear better maintained. Travelling from one side of Mumbai to another no longer seems quite the logistical exercise it once was.

Perhaps more importantly, Mumbai no longer feels like it's simply coping with its phenomenal growth. It is planning for it.

That doesn't mean everything has changed. Spend five minutes at a busy intersection, and you'll quickly realise that organised chaos is still very much the local traffic philosophy. Somehow cars, motorcycles, buses, pedestrians and the occasional cow negotiate their way through seemingly impossible situations with an efficiency that defies logic. For visitors, it remains both mildly terrifying and endlessly entertaining.

Yet that, too, is part of Mumbai's charm. It has never aspired to be orderly in the conventional sense. Instead, it has perfected its own rhythm, and once you stop trying to understand it, you begin to appreciate it.



A FRESH TAKE ON FAMILIAR LANDMARKS

Like millions of visitors before me, I found myself drawn to the Gateway of India. Standing proudly on the waterfront overlooking the Arabian Sea, the imposing basalt arch remains one of India's defining landmarks. Built during the British Raj and completed in 1924, it has witnessed some of the country's most significant historical moments, from royal visits to the departure of the last British troops after independence. Today it serves a rather simpler purpose, welcoming travellers from around the world while providing one of Mumbai's most recognisable postcard views.

Directly opposite stands the magnificent Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, whose distinctive red dome has become almost inseparable from the Gateway itself. Elegant without being ostentatious, it remains one of the world's great heritage hotels and a reminder that Mumbai has long been an international city. From there, Marine Drive beckons.

Curving gracefully around Back Bay, this sweeping boulevard has changed remarkably little over the years, and thankfully so. Known affectionately as the Queen's Necklace because of the string of lights that sparkle after dark, it remains one of the city's great gathering places. At sunrise it belongs to runners and early risers. By late afternoon, families, office workers and tourists settle along the sea wall, sharing conversations while the Arabian Sea provides a welcome escape from the relentless pace of the streets behind them.

What struck me wasn't simply the view, but how much more inviting the entire precinct felt. Cleaner pavements, improved public spaces and an obvious sense of civic pride have elevated an already iconic destination into somewhere you genuinely want to linger.

HISTORY THAT REFUSES TO STAND STILL

If Marine Drive showcases modern Mumbai at its most elegant, Chhatrapati

Shivaji Maharaj Terminus reminds visitors that the city's history remains every bit as compelling.

Still affectionately known by many as Victoria Terminus, the magnificent railway station is one of the finest examples of Victorian Gothic Revival architecture anywhere in the world. Completed in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, its elaborate stone carvings, soaring turrets and stained-glass windows would not look out of place in Europe.

Except this is no museum piece. Every day, millions of commuters stream through its platforms, transforming what could have been a preserved historical monument into one of the busiest railway stations on the planet. It is both a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a vital piece of the city's transport network, a uniquely Mumbai contradiction that somehow works perfectly.

The surrounding Fort district deserves equal attention. Here, beautifully preserved colonial buildings sit comfortably alongside elegant Art Deco apartments, many overlooking the Oval Maidan where impromptu cricket matches unfold beneath the shadow of gleaming office towers. It is an area best explored on foot, giving you time to appreciate architectural details that are easy to miss when navigating the city's busy roads.

Looking up became something of a theme during my visit. Mumbai has an unfortunate habit of overwhelming visitors at street level, yet many of its greatest treasures lie several storeys above eye level. Ornate balconies, decorative facades and intricately carved stonework tell the story of a city whose heritage often competes for attention with its modern ambitions.

THE HEART OF THE CITY

Of course, no amount of impressive architecture defines Mumbai nearly as much as its people.

The city lives and breathes through its markets, cafés and street corners. Wander through Colaba Causeway, and you'll find everything from handcrafted jewellery and colourful textiles to books, antiques and souvenirs. Venture into Crawford Market and the atmosphere changes again, with traders enthusiastically promoting fresh produce, fragrant spices and just about anything else you could imagine.

Food is woven into every aspect of life here. Whether you're enjoying buttery pav bhaji from a bustling street stall, sampling a perfectly crisp dosa, or stopping for a restorative cup of masala chai, eating in Mumbai is less about fine dining and more about joining the city's rhythm. It is impossible not to notice the contrasts.

Luxury cars glide past ageing taxis. Towering skyscrapers cast long shadows over century-old buildings. Five-star hotels stand within sight of crowded railway stations, while



moments of remarkable tranquillity can be found inside ancient temples only a few streets removed from the city's relentless traffic.

Many cities attempt to disguise their contradictions, but Mumbai embraces them. That willingness to wear every facet of its identity proudly is perhaps what makes it so captivating. It never pretends to be perfect, nor does it apologise for its imperfections. Instead, it simply carries on, confident that visitors willing to spend a little time here will eventually understand what makes it special.

By the end of my stay, I realised something else had changed over the past decade. Not just this magnificent city, but also my perspective

The sensory overload that dominated my first visit had faded into the background, letting the city's architecture, culture, and unmistakable spirit come into sharper focus. Perhaps that comes with experience, or perhaps Mumbai itself has matured enough for those qualities to shine more brightly than before.

Either way, I left with a very different impression from the one I carried home ten years ago. Mumbai remains loud, busy and gloriously unpredictable. It still demands patience, rewards curiosity and occasionally tests your resolve. Yet today it also feels cleaner, more connected and more welcoming than ever before. It is a city investing in its future while remaining fiercely proud of its past, and that balance is no easy achievement.

Some places deserve a second chance, but Mumbai, it turns out, deserves a second visit.



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