

Encyclopedia entry

Read an encyclopedia entry on the Taj Mahal to practise and improve your reading skills.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–f) with the vocabulary (1–6).

Vocabulary

1. a fountain
2. a pathway
3. a dome
4. an archway
5. precious stones
6. marble

Definition

- a. a rounded roof with a circle-shaped base
- b. valuable stones like diamonds, rubies and emeralds
- c. a narrow track for walking on
- d. a structure in a garden or park that pushes water into the air
- e. a type of hard smooth stone that is often used for decoration
- f. a curved structure, often over an entrance or passage

Reading text: An encyclopedia entry

The Taj Mahal (pronounced /tɑːdʒ m'hɑːl/) is a famous mausoleum next to the river Yamuna in the Indian city of Agra. A mausoleum is a building where people bury the dead. The name Taj Mahal means 'the crown of palaces'.

1.

The most famous part of the Taj Mahal is the large white dome in the centre. It is 35 metres high and is surrounded by four smaller domes. The rooms inside the building are decorated with beautiful archways and precious stones in the walls. The buildings are surrounded by gardens with pathways, pools, fountains and green gardens.

2.

The construction of the Taj Mahal began in 1632 and finished in 1653. It was built with materials from all over India and Asia, but the main material is white marble. Historians believe that the materials were transported by over 1,000 elephants for the construction.

3.

The emperor Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal as a burial place for his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. According to legend, he wanted to build another Taj Mahal in black on the other side of the river, but this never happened. During the Indian Rebellion of 1857, many parts of the Taj Mahal were damaged by British soldiers, who took some of the precious stones from its walls. Over the years, the Taj Mahal has suffered from environmental damage, and there have been many government attempts to conserve its beauty.

4.

The Taj Mahal is one of India's most famous landmarks. There are millions of visitors to the mausoleum every year. The Taj Mahal is almost always included in lists of famous buildings to visit and is considered one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. It is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

5.

- Encyclopedia Britannica article on the Taj Mahal: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Taj-Mahal>
- Official site of the Taj Mahal: <https://www.tajmahal.gov.in/>
- UNESCO Profile of the Taj Mahal: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/252>

Tasks

Task 1

Match the paragraphs (1–5) with the best paragraph headings (a–f). One heading is not needed.

Paragraph	Heading
1.	a. History
2.	b. Gallery
3.	c. Architecture
4.	d. Construction
5.	e. Tourism
Not needed	f. References

Task 2

Are the sentences true, false or not mentioned?

1. The Taj Mahal is constructed of white marble and a small amount of black marble.

a. True	b. False	c. The text doesn't say.
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2. There are water features in the gardens of the Taj Mahal.

a. True	b. False	c. The text doesn't say.
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3. The construction of the Taj Mahal never finished.

a. True	b. False	c. The text doesn't say.
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4. The materials for the Taj Mahal are not all from India.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 - c. The text doesn't say.

5. There was a black Taj Mahal on the other side of the river.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 - c. The text doesn't say.

6. The British destroyed the Taj Mahal in the 20th century.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 - c. The text doesn't say.

7. The Indian government is trying to protect the Taj Mahal.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 - c. The text doesn't say.

8. The Taj Mahal is the most visited building in India.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 - c. The text doesn't say.

Discussion

What famous places have you seen?

Answers

Preparation task

1. d
2. c
3. a
4. f
5. b
6. e

Task 1

1. c
2. d
3. a
4. e
5. f
- Not needed b

Task 2

1. c
2. a
3. b
4. a
5. b
6. b
7. a
8. c