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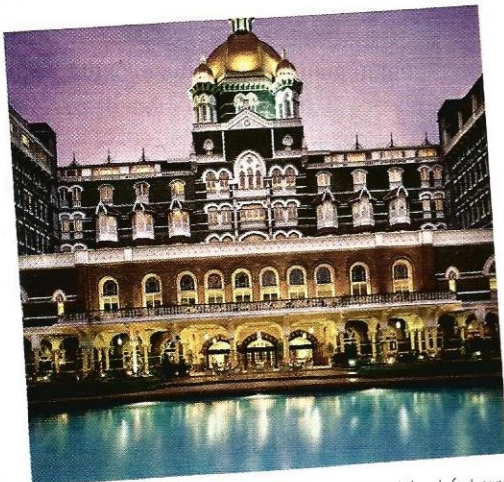
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The Taj Mahal Palace hotel, which featured in BBC2's *Hotel India* this September, has stunning views

Bustle & BLISS

Eva Gizowska mixes sightseeing and spas on a trip to India's Mumbai



The Taj Mahal Palace hotel is steeped in history and a great place to have lunch or tea

The glare of the sun is making me break out in a sweat. But so is trying to cross the road. Mumbai is fast-paced and exciting enough without having to dodge speeding cars and trucks. Traffic lights? What traffic lights? I've yet to see a driver stop at a red one.

'There would be nothing to frighten you if you refused to be afraid.' How very apt. These are the wise words of Mahatma Gandhi. It's day one of a four-day break in Mumbai and we're on a guided tour of the city. We're looking round Mani Bhavan, the house where Gandhi lived

from 1917–1934. The walls are dotted with photos and cuttings depicting the leader of Indian nationalism's life – and many of his famous quotes.

CITY HIGHLIGHTS

Afterwards, it's time for more landmarks. We stroll around Chhatrapati Shivaji station, a vast Victorian Gothic-style building that featured in the film *Slumdog Millionaire*. We also visit Dhobi Ghat, Mumbai's famous open-air laundry, where everything's washed in huge outdoor vats and left to dry in the sun.

After the heat of the city, I can't wait to have a swim in the hotel pool. I'm staying at the excellent-value, luxurious Vivanta by Taj President Hotel. It's a great base from

which to explore South Mumbai and is close to Marine Drive, the coastal promenade that runs parallel to Chowpatty Beach. Locals come here in the morning to jog and do yoga before work, and it's a lovely spot to watch the sun set. The Vivanta is also a short taxi drive from the Colaba Causeway, a busy shopping area with stalls and markets selling jewellery, clothes, fabrics, oils and incense sticks. Mumbai's best-known markets Crawford Market, and Chor Bazaar (Thieves Market) are just down the road.

SPA TIME

Cool and refreshed after my swim, I make my way to the hotel's Jiva Spa. Jiva means 'inner force' in Sanskrit. Healing your 'inner energy' through natural, holistic rituals and treatments is what this spa's all about. The vast array of treatments are based on ancient healing practices. The traditional Indian therapies include Sammardana, a deep-tissue massage that works on deep-seated stress; Pada Mardana, a therapeutic Indian Foot Massage; Champi, Indian Head Massage; or Indian aromatherapy treatments such as Orja Dayaka (an energising massage) and Pavithri (a detoxifying treatment) using aromatic oils including ginger, lime, sandalwood, and ashwagandha (a balancing herbal oil).

Should I opt for an Indian Body Ritual? Or a detoxifying Mocha Patra Plantain Leaf Wrap? Or Masala Spice Scrub? I choose a relaxing, deep-tissue massage in the end. The Spa's an oasis of calm and the therapist greets me with the traditional Indian 'namaste' (I bow to you and may our minds meet) greeting. Each treatment begins with a refreshing rose petal foot-soak in water infused with detoxifying essential oils. The lights are dimmed and there's soothing Indian music playing. The therapist applies a blend of frankincense, kewda and brahmi (herbal), sandalwood and sesame oil, then uses a mix of alternating palm and thumb strokes to release knots and tension in my body. It's one of the best massages I've ever had.

ANOTHER VIBE

That evening, we dine at the hotel's Konkan Café restaurant, enjoying a feast of South West-inspired Indian cuisine with a mix of vegetarian and meat, spice- and herb-infused dishes. Then it's a quick nightcap at the hotel's Wink Bar, a popular hot spot with fashionable Mumbaikers.

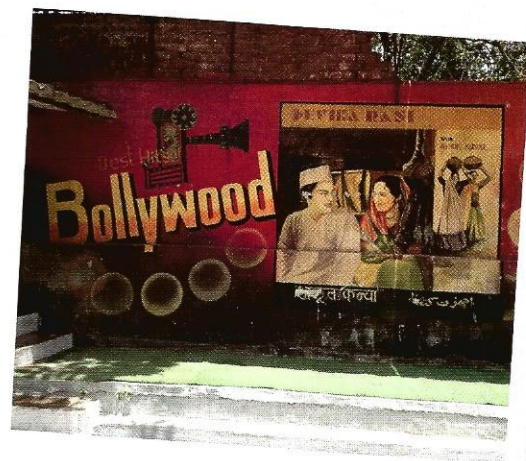
The next morning, we head to the fish market at Sassoon Docks. Around 300 years ago, Mumbai, formerly Bombay, was

a marshy cluster of fishing islands – and the busy, thriving fishing market is what remains today. Women in bright saris sit cleaning and preparing the fish, chatting and laughing.

Shortly before I'd left for Mumbai, I'd watched the award-winning film *The Lunch Box*, so it's fascinating to see dabbawallahs (the delivery men who transport lunches around Mumbai on their bikes) in action. Of course, Mumbai is also home to the Bollywood film industry. So, it's with great excitement that we take a Bollywood tour, visiting Film City where films and TV series are filmed. We tour the film sets, watch Bollywood dancing and learn how films are made (bollywoodtourism.com).

We spend our last two nights in Mumbai at the Taj Land's End Hotel in the Bandra district. It's the opposite of the frenetic, bustling South of Mumbai; this leafy, fashionable suburb is where many Bollywood stars, including Salman Khan and Kareena Kapoor, live. It's also famous for its beaches and there's a real beach bar, 'yoga on the sand', Malibu vibe. The Taj Land's End sits on a hill, overlooking the Arabian Sea and the rooms are plush with incredible views. The hotel's Atrium Lounge is a favourite with celebs. There's also an amazing outdoor swimming pool, fitness centre and spa, where I try a detoxifying body wrap, and a relaxing back massage.

As I leave this vibrant city, another of Ghandi's quotes comes to mind, 'Live as



Take a Bollywood tour at Film City and learn more about the energetic genre

if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever'. Not a bad resolution to go home with. ■

FACT FILE

- Eva went with Greaves Travel (greavesindia.co.uk). Tailor-made tours start from £1,350pp, based on two sharing, including flights, for four nights.
- Vivanta by Taj President Hotel and Taj Land's End Hotels cost from £120 per night based on two sharing. Treatments start from around £40 for 45-60 minutes (tajhotels.com).
- Eva flew with Virgin Atlantic (virgin-atlantic.com).



Lap up the peace and quiet at the Taj Land's End hotel