

# **Taj Mahal: US President Donald Trump visits India's 'monument of love'**

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US President Donald Trump and his wife Melania have visited the Taj Mahal on the first day of their trip to India.

The iconic "monument to love" was the second stop in a 36-hour official visit, Mr Trump's first to India.

Earlier on Monday he landed in Gujarat, the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi - who greeted him along with tens of thousands of Indians.

The leaders of the world's two largest democracies will meet on Tuesday. No big deals are expected to be signed.

Mr Trump received an exuberant welcome in the northern city of Agra, which included dancers dressed as peacocks and horses.

While Mr Modi was not present, he was greeted by a close ally of his, Yogi Adityanath, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh state, where Agra is located.

The Trumps then left for the Taj Mahal, a 17th-Century marble mausoleum built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his queen, Mumtaz Mahal.

It is perhaps India's most famous monument and is usually part of every visiting dignitary's itinerary.

Media captionWhy Trump's India visit matters

Namaste, India

Earlier, in Gujarat's Ahmedabad city, Mr Trump addressed a huge crowd at the Motera cricket stadium.

"Namaste," he began to thunderous applause, before going on to refer to several Indian icons, from history to cricket to Bollywood.

"India will always hold a very special place in our hearts," he added.

He also had words of praise for Mr Modi: "Everybody loves him but I will tell you this, he is very tough. You are not just the pride of Gujarat, you are living proof that with hard work, Indians can accomplish anything they want."

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Image caption

Mr Trump arrived in Agra to a colourful welcome

However, he struggled to pronounce several Indian words - from Ahmedabad, the city where he was speaking, to Swami Vivekananda, an Indian philosopher, greatly admired by Mr Modi. He also called the Vedas - ancient Hindu texts - "Vestas".

He ended his speech by saying: "God bless India, God bless the United States of America - we love you, we love you very much." He spoke after Mr Modi, and crowds began leaving mid-way through the US president's speech.

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Report

Energy but little excitement

Rajini Vaidyanathan, BBC News, Ahmedabad

Inside the arena Mr Trump was welcomed warmly, but the biggest cheers were for Prime Minister Modi - no surprise, this is his home town.

I've been to rallies for both leaders - and while there was an energy as the two political rock stars headlined the same event, it lacked much of the excitement of their solo appearances.

There were some awkward moments as President Trump tried his best with Indian names. In the world's largest cricket stadium, he managed to mangle the pronunciation of one of the world's greatest cricketers, Sachin Tendulkar.

But overall, it did what both men wanted - cement the close ties they and their nations share.

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Modi in the spotlight

Mr Trump's visit comes at an opportune time for Mr Modi, who has been under the spotlight in recent months following controversial decisions by his government.

In December, India passed a contentious new citizenship law granting amnesty to non-Muslim immigrants from three nearby countries. This prompted massive protests across the country, with critics accusing the government of marginalising India's more than 200 million Muslims - a charge the government denies.

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But protests are still continuing, including in Delhi, where a policeman was killed on Monday after violence broke out hours ahead of Mr Trump's visit.

Clashes had erupted between groups protesting against the citizenship law, and those in favour of it.

In August, Mr Modi's government revoked the partial autonomy of the disputed territory of Indian-administered Kashmir, sparking protests in the Muslim-majority valley. Mobile phone connections and the internet have only been partially restored, and political leaders there are still under house arrest along with hundreds of others.

The two decisions have sharply polarised India, and have been questioned by leaders abroad.

Image caption

More than 100,000 people packed Motera stadium for the rally

But Mr Modi put on a grand public reception to welcome Mr Trump. In Gujarat he was greeted with a road show as crowds lined his route to the stadium. It featured performers from across the country, showcasing the arts from different states.

Billboards along the route to the Motera stadium were emblazoned with pictures of the two men and carried slogans such as "two dynamic personalities, one momentous occasion".

Mr Trump entered to the music of Elton John, which he is known to love, playing on the speakers.

The event is being compared to the "Howdy, Modi!" event that Mr Trump and Mr Modi held in Houston last year, which was attended by 50,000 people.

A visit to Gandhi's home

Mr Trump also made a quick stop at the Sabarmati Ashram, where Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi, who was born in Gujarat, lived for 13 years.