



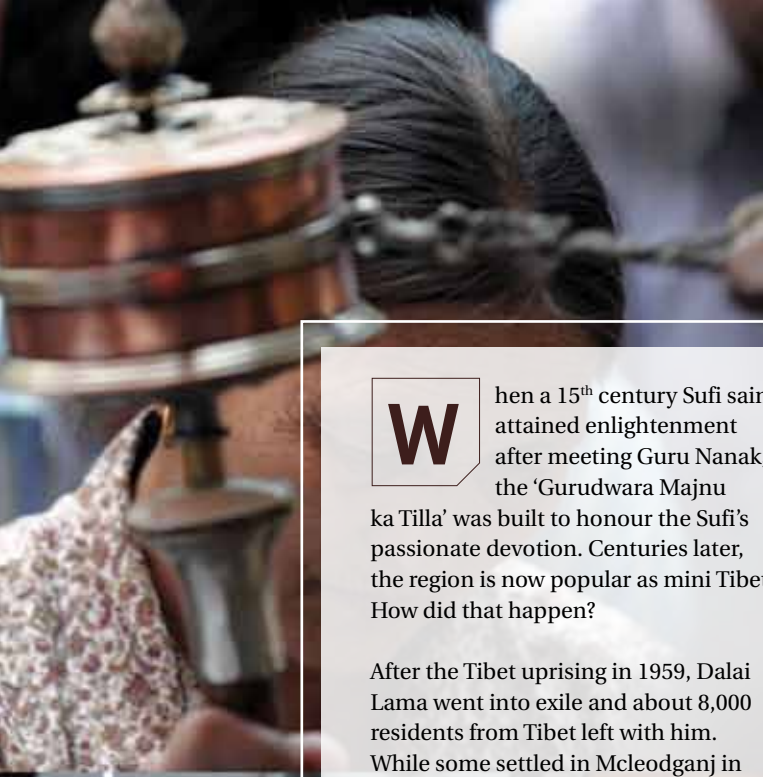
## MINI TIBET in

# DELHI

Like most big cities around the world, Delhi is a potpourri of people and cultures. Millions find their way into the city to fulfill their dreams and aspirations. Among them is a Tibetan refugee community with a different kind of dream...to go back to their homeland. Until that day, they have made their home in a tiny neighbourhood in north Delhi called Majnu ka Tilla.

words // **Edwina D'Souza**





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hen a 15<sup>th</sup> century Sufi saint attained enlightenment after meeting Guru Nanak, the 'Gurudwara Majnu ka Tilla' was built to honour the Sufi's passionate devotion. Centuries later, the region is now popular as mini Tibet. How did that happen?

After the Tibet uprising in 1959, Dalai Lama went into exile and about 8,000 residents from Tibet left with him. While some settled in Mcleodganj in Himachal Pradesh, few others found their way to Delhi. After the Indo-Chinese war in 1962, many more residents had to leave Tibet and a large number of them settled in the Tibetan refugee colony in Majnu ka Tilla, a piece of land which the Indian Government officially allotted to them to call their home. More recently, Majnu ka Tilla was rechristened as New Aruna Nagar, although people still refer to the colony by its former name or Samyeling.

**HOME AWAY FROM HOME**

Majnu ka Tilla is home to many second and third generation Tibetan refugees. They have grown up in Delhi listening to tales of Tibet from their families who had to go through the painful ordeal of leaving their country. Today, the people of the community live a closely knit life trying to preserve their cultural lineage.

With about 400 Tibetan families permanently living in Majnu ka

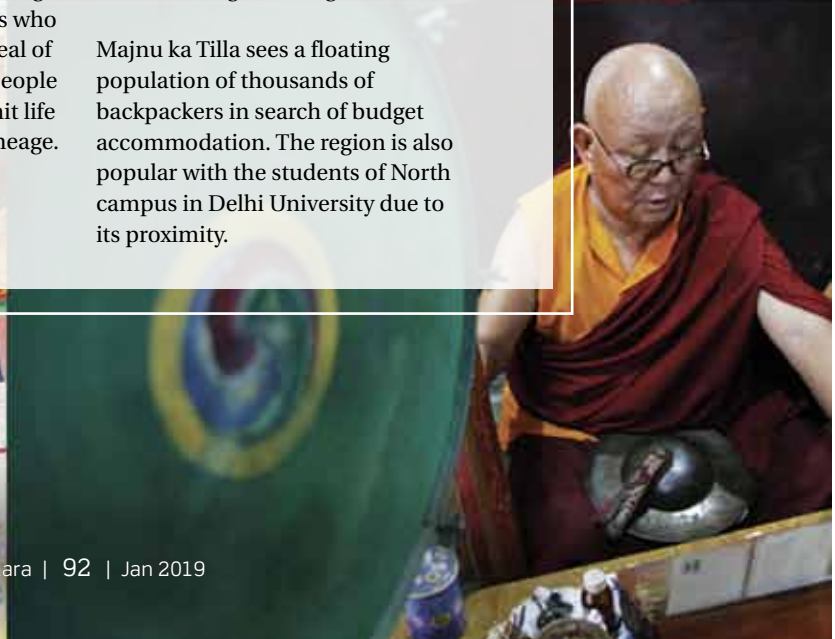
Tilla, it's a country packed into a neighbourhood. Children are taught to read and write the Tibetan script at home schools. Tibetan prayer flags flutter across balconies and terraces. Monks stroll through the narrow alleys in their deep red robes; and residents gather over a cup of butter tea to chat in their local language.

The monastery square in the heart of Majnu ka Tilla has a Buddhist temple with prayer wheels and a picture of his holiness Dalai Lama. Incense smoke fills the air during the evenings along with soft prayer chants which can be heard from a distance. One can only imagine the vibe of this place during Losar, the Tibetan New Year.

**TURNING THE TABLES**

What intended to be a refugee colony for Tibetans, has today turned into a thriving multicultural society, expanding to include the Nepalese diaspora as well as people from the North Eastern states of India. The residents are not only preserving their cultures but making it accessible to outsiders and in doing so, creating tourism and generating revenue.

Majnu ka Tilla sees a floating population of thousands of backpackers in search of budget accommodation. The region is also popular with the students of North campus in Delhi University due to its proximity.





## Today, the people of Tibetan community live a closely knit life trying to preserve their cultural lineage

Markets sell everything from junk jewellery to bags, caps and t-shirts with 'I love Tibet' written on them. Grocery stores have imports like Tibetan spices, pickles, yak butter, cheese and biscuits. Souvenir shops sell handmade carpets and masks. There are pharmacies, foreign exchange and even travel agents selling package tours to Dharamshala, Sarnath and Bodh Gaya. By all means, Majnu ka Tilla may not be a place for steal deals, but it will still surprise you with its diverse collection of trendy clothes and shoes. You can also visit the place to get the coolest and quirkiest haircut for a rockstar appearance!

### FOR THE LOVE OF FOOD

Delhi is notable for its food scene. From regional thalis to the best fine dine restaurants and fusion eats, there's something here for everyone. Majnu ka Tilla adds a whole new dimension to the capital with its authentic Tibetan, Nepalese and Korean cuisine.

Laphing (a cold spicy roll with chicken or soya) is an absolute must-try from the stalls inside the place. You'll also find women selling street food like chicken momos, Tsampa (Tibetan porridge), Khapse (deep fried biscuits) and cured

meats being grilled on skewers. For a proper Tibetan meal, head to the Himalayan Restaurant. Non-experimentalists can stick to Thukpa (noodle soup with chicken) and momos. The adventurer can dive into some authentic Tibetan meat ribs. For mains, try Tingmo (Tibetan soft bun) along with shapta (meat and vegetables in semi gravy). Flush it all down with a cold mug of beer. Old haunts like the Dolma House and Wongdhen House are other favourites for local specialities like Gyuma (Tibetan sausage), Shabalay (a fried meat filled pie) and Chaylay (an exotic Tibetan speciality). To complete the meal, head to Ama's cafe for some Tibetan desserts such as Mud cake, Yak Tibetan Cheesecake or a hot mug of Butter tea.

It is easy to lose yourself in the small alleys of this place where every road is decorated with prayer flags and where every corner offers something unique to the visitor. ✨



### HOW TO GET THERE

Delhi is the hub airport for Vistara, and offers convenient connections to other cities.