

If you have only one night in Delhi...

Sonal Shah tells newbies and Dilliwalas with visitors to head to Connaught Place.

Delhi has a surprising amount of nightlife, but it can be difficult for a newcomer to dig beneath deserted city streets and Paharganj dens. Expats or upmarket tourists may never get beyond a stuffy hotel bar or an overpriced lounge, and even if you have guests in town, where do you take them? The answer is obvious – the centre of the city.

When we went tourist-style, we had to prepare ourselves with appropriate attire. You'll do just fine with the bling-quotient on Janpath. We found some earrings in the Tibetan Market and pretty nice duds in the clothing market. Try bargaining, but ladies beware – in order to help you "adjust" the garment you are trying, the attendant may just "adjust" you too. If you think it's worth a Rs 100 discount, we certainly won't pass judgement. If you don't, just repeat the salesman's words right back at him: "Only look!"

If you're staying at a hotel in the area, you could take a break there. We availed of the lovely wood-panelled Imperial Hotel facilities. The hotel also has two elegant bars, Patiala Peg and 1911.

Next, we headed to Blues in N Block to guzzle some happy hour beer and nachos. Despite the occasionally odd crowd, there's no cause for concern. As one of the rather sweet waiters told us chivalrously, "It's our duty to protect our beauties." As the beer began to take effect, we began singing along to "Hotel California". Newcomers should know: rock 'n' roll is alive in India, and bars like Blues are the proof.

No one in Delhi worth their tequila salt eats until the very end of a night out. But we were actually pretty hungry after all that haggling and singing. Around 10.30pm, we ambled around to Nizam's restaurant. We walked through Central Park and watched the pretty coloured lights illuminating the liquid landscaping. At Nizam's we ordered single-mutt-ton-single-egg rolls. There are double-double versions too, for the terminally hungry.

We broke journey at DV8 – this used to be the Cellar, a raging disco when the Stones were young. Now it's more of a club-like bar with wooden panelling and leather sofas. We segued from beer to liquor via their beer busters: a Kamikaze shot in a pint of beer.

There are other classic old restaurants like Volga's that offer long happy hours and a weird ambience, but they close at midnight. Only five-star hotels are open longer.

Next stop, then, is Agni. Nowadays this is probably CP's only dance venue. It's open late and plays a good selection of pop and Bollywood. The DJ's not the most creative, but after happy hour and rolls, who cares? Visiting DJs stop by. The cocktail selection at Agni is a fine introduction to India's yogic tradition: get a drink named after energy chakras. Agni's décor reflects Delhi's summer. Flames lick the walls. Girls have been known to dance on the bar, if you're willing, hop on.

After a couple of hours of learning to dance bhangra and chatting up a few travellers, we were finally ready to call it a night.

1911/The Garden Party Imperial Hotel, Janpath (2334-1234). ☎ Rajiv Chowk. Daily 6am-1am. Bar timings 11.30am-1am.

Agni The Park Hotel, 15 Parliament Street (2374-3000). ☎ Rajiv Chowk. Daily 11am-1am.

Blues N-18 Connaught Place, Outer Circle (4152-3486). ☎ Rajiv Chowk. Daily noon-midnight.

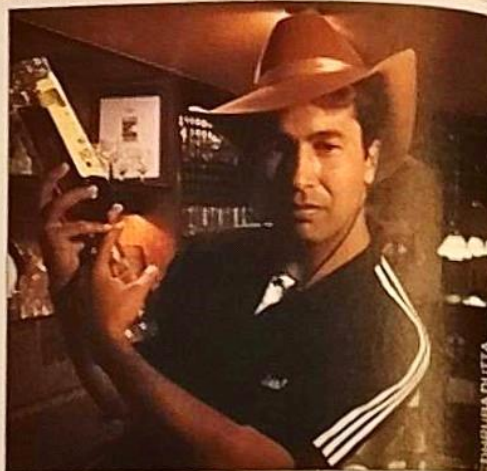
DV8 13 Regal Building, Connaught Place, Outer Circle (4150-0693). ☎ Rajiv Chowk. Daily 11.30am-midnight.

Patiala Peg Imperial Hotel, Janpath (2334-1234). ☎ Rajiv Chowk. Daily 12.30pm-midnight.

Nizam's H-5/6, Plaza Building, Connaught Place (2332-1953). Daily till 11pm.

Volga's B-19 Connaught Place, Inner Circle (2332-2960). ☎ Rajiv Chowk. Daily 1-10.30pm.

Tending bar



Deepak Fartyal, Turquoise Cottage

The best thing that happened to me on the job? Once I was on the bar and decided to try out a new cocktail. A little later, a woman walked in and asked me to give her something that wasn't on the menu. I made the new drink for her – she said it was great and asked for my number!

I'm originally from Nainital but I heard about bartending from my cousin who was in the hotel line in Mumbai. I started at the Regency restaurant there. When I came to Delhi, I did some private parties and worked at places like D-Minor and the Uphaar Cinema. I've been working at Turquoise Cottage for three or four years. To be a bartender you need to know your drinks, be aware of your surroundings, and be a team player.

I can mix any drink in under two minutes and can perform flare techniques also. I was just featured in a recent Bacardi all-India bartending competition.

I call my signature drink the Mona Lisa. You mix 30ml vodka, 30ml Bacardi, 20ml grenadine and 20ml of lime/sugar concentrate. Serve in a cocktail glass with green chillies cut down the middle.

What do I drink? Simple. Jack Daniels and coke. As told to Sonal Shah