

My City
My Heritage

Luck
now

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Chowk Chronicles A Walk through Time, Taste, and Tradition

2 KM

GOL DARWAZA



Comprising a sprawling network of narrow lanes, Chowk is more than just a market. It is home to centuries-old residential complexes, historic inns, banks, post offices, and the city's iconic Kotwali (police station). The word chowk, meaning "crossroad" or "intersection," perfectly captures its essence—a meeting point of traders, artisans, and storytellers.



The grandeur of its past is marked by Akbari Darwaza, dating back to Emperor Akbar's time, and Gol Darwaza, an architectural imprint from the era of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula. Chowk has always been renowned for its traditional crafts and culinary heritage. From the delicate artistry of *chikankari* embroidery to the fragrances of *attars* (perfumes) and the rich, slow-cooked flavors of Awadhi cuisine, it is a place where heritage is not merely preserved but lived every day.

This trail invites you to witness the history woven into the fabric of daily life of Chowk—in its intricate hand-embroidery, beloved delicacies, and lyrical cadence of Urdu poetry exchanged in quiet corners.

1 Gol Darwaza

Built between 1784 and 1785 by Nawab Asaf-ud-Daulah, Gol Darwaza once marked the entrance to Chowk Bazaar from the Royal

Palaces and Quila Machhi Bhawan.

Asaf-ud-Daulah was not just known for the grand architecture he built but for his generosity as well. A well-known tale from here speaks of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula's legendary generosity. While passing through the market, he came across an elderly woman selling a simple rosary. Misunderstanding his question about its price, she replied, '*Lakh*' (referring to the material, lac). Amused yet ever-benevolent, the Nawab paid her ₹15,000, turning an ordinary sale into a fabled act of kindness.

2 Flavours that Tell Stories

Lucknow's food culture is deeply rooted in royal kitchens and age-old street food traditions. Chowk remains a key destination for experiencing Awadhi cuisine, where slow-cooked dishes, delicate flavors, and rich textures define every

meal. While Lucknow is famed for its non-vegetarian food, there are place in Chowk that proves vegetarian food can be just as iconic.



A visit to Chowk is incomplete without sampling some of its celebrated offerings. One can explore renowned spots for breakfast dishes including

- *Chole bhature* at Shree, paired with thick, creamy lassi;
- *Malai makhan*, a saffron-infused, airy sweet reminiscent of the Nawabi love for indulgence, from any of the vendors at Chowk;
- The iconic *meetha paan*, a quintessential post-meal tradition in Lucknow;
- Slow-cooked Awadhi specialties such as *Nihari* paired with soft, flaky *kulchas*, at Raheem.

3 Chikankari Shopping

Lucknow and *chikankari* are inseparable. The intricate artistry that once graced the robes of Nawabs features, in its classic form, white-on-white embroidery, in which fine stitches create floral patterns and lattices on fine fabrics. While its origin—from Persia or Bengal—remains debated, its refinement in Lucknow under the patronage of the Nawabs is undisputed. Historically, as many as 32 stitches were recognised in *chikankari*, but over time, the repertoire has shrunk to just eight to ten predominant stitches. The Nawabi period celebrated fine *jaalis*, while in the 1980s, *bakhiya* (reverse herringbone) known as the shadow stitch, became popular.

Walking through Chowk's by-lanes, one can step into any shop and find hand-embroidered fabric. Whether delicate shadow work or floral *jaali*



patterns, this is where Lucknow's famed *chikankari* comes alive in every stitch.

4 **Shahi Shafakhana and Kaptan Kuan**

Established by King Nazir-ud-Din Haider, the Shahi Shafakhana once offered both allopathic and Unani treatments. Later, it was confined to only Unani treatment.

other layer to Chowk's hidden histories.

5 **Nepali Kothi**

Built in the 1930s by traders dealing in *kesar* (saffron) and *kasturi* (musk), Nepali Kothi is a striking mansion with intricate stucco work and expansive courtyards. One of Chowk's lesser-known treasures, it offers a glimpse into the architectural grandeur of the trading communities that once flourished in the city.



Today, its dilapidated gateway, adorned with the emblematic Nawabi fish motif, stands as a reminder of Lucknow's medical heritage.

Nearby, hidden beneath a modern shop, lies a well commemorating Kaptan Fateh Ali Khan. A trusted officer of Nawab Saadat Ali Khan, Fateh Ali Khan played a key role in safeguarding royal treasures. Though the Persian inscriptions on the well are now concealed, its presence adds an-

6 **Saudagar Ka Imambara**

Commissioned by a wealthy trader in the nineteenth century, Saudagar Ka Imambara is an architectural jewel. Its twin halls are adorned with antique chandeliers, some hanging so low you could almost touch them. Many still retain their original splendor, evoking an era where even merchant homes echoed the grandeur of Nawabi palaces.

7 Tehseen Ki Masjid

Built by the nobleman Tehseen Ali Khan, this mosque is among Lucknow's most revered places of worship, alongside the Asafi Masjid and Jama Masjid. Its impressive domes and arches showcase a blend of Mughal and Awadhi architectural styles, making it a serene yet visually stunning stop on the trail.

8 The Perfume Culture of Lucknow

For centuries, Lucknow's perfumers (*attar*-makers) have



perfected the art of blending fragrances that capture the essence of the city. The tradi-

tion of *attar*-making is deeply linked with the city's cultural and poetic heritage, often associated with *kothas*, Urdu po-



etry, and the Nawabi courts.

A visit to an *attar* shop, such as Izharson's Itr Shop opposite Tehseen ki Masjid, in Chowk offers an opportunity to explore a range of fragrances—from rose and sandalwood to musky, exotic blends.

integral part of Qaiserbagh much like its twin, Butler Park.

Please note:

- The lanes of Chowk are extremely narrow, so the trail is best explored on foot. Wear comfortable footwear.
- There is no entry fee for the architecture/heritage sites included in the trail.

- Photography is allowed for exteriors; interiors upon request.
- Kindly respect the cultural and religious significance/sentiments of the spaces. Modest clothing is recommended. Expect to remove your shoes before entering.

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