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DELHI JOURNAL (PART III): A HOTEL WITH CHARACTER

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There are some hotels that I just don't get. [Claridge's in London](#) is one, [Raffles in Singapore](#) is another, and the [Imperial in Delhi](#) is a third. I just don't see what the fuss is all about. The Imperial is one of those Delhi hotels that everyone loves, including my husband. All my friends told me that I must stay there. But frankly, I was a little underwhelmed. The service was polite but just that. Nobody extended themselves. When I asked the receptionist for some Scotch tape, she told me to walk across to the bell desk for some. A gentleman beside me was arguing with the receptionist, who had just informed him that he could use the house phone to contact a guest. "Why can't you just ring the room for me?" the gentleman asked. My room was a standard room with all the right trimmings—Porthault linens, Fragonard toiletries, reasonable size, forgettable decor. The food was decent but nothing I would rave about, like I would rave about Bukhara at the Maurya Sheraton or Masala Art at the Taj Palace, the other top choices in Delhi.



A room at Delhi's new Shangri-La Hotel.

service is ever-smiling and gracious. The breakfast buffet is the best in town. Make sure you ask for dosas. They aren't displayed, but the chef will make them on order. Too bad I didn't know this before I ordered. After a full breakfast, I longingly watched waiters bear crispy golden dosas to the nearby table. They looked really good, especially laced with some tomato or coconut chutney and sambar. The Shangri-La offers great views of the boulevards of Delhi, and on a clear day, you can even see India Gate at a distance. I would stay there again.

But—and here is where I see my husband's point of view—the Imperial has something which fewer and fewer hotels have these days: character. Not so much in its rooms, but in the public areas. The hotel has a wonderful collection of British prints about India. I happily spent an hour walking around the main lobby peering at these works, which often show prim English ladies having tea. One 18th-century piece by Tipu Sultan shows this Indian warrior-artist offering his two children as hostages to some British lord. There are walls filled with swords and other war memorabilia, along with archival photos. Character, history, call it what you will, but it is something that you cannot fake. Around the corner from the Imperial is the [Shangri-La](#), the new kid on the block. The Shangri-La has no history or character, but my room was sleek and comfortable, and the

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