

# Georgia's Own Taj Mahal

Let the stunning architecture of this Hindu temple take your breath away. BY JENNIFER DOME

As you round a corner on Rockbridge Road in suburban Atlanta, the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, or Hindu temple, rises from the ground like a grand, dove-white pyramid. Standing in front of the monolithic structure, you feel dwarfed. But the lush landscaping, reflective pool, and calm atmosphere put you at ease immediately, even if you're unfamiliar with the Hindu religion and traditions. You don't need to be familiar. You'll learn.

**An Unbelievable Task** The construction of this structure followed ancient Hindu instructions. Not only were the building materials—pink Indian sandstone, Italian marble, and Turkish limestone—shipped from around the globe, but the temple was fashioned like a giant jigsaw puzzle, with no metal holding the building together. The three tiers are an homage to the body of God, with the columns representing legs, windows as ears, and the flags as hair. These red-and-white flags flying high above the Mandir symbolize victory of good over evil.

The effort in building the Mandir becomes even clearer on the inside, where you could marvel for hours at the intricately carved marble columns and statues or silently observe a ritual that may take place during your visit. Be sure to examine the carvings in the recessed ceiling in the center of the sanctuary. Each amazingly detailed figurine represents one of the 16 Hindu stages of human life, from birth to death. Something to ponder in quiet reflection. ●

BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR: 460 Rockbridge Road NW, Lilburn, GA 30047; [www.swaminarayan.org/globalnetwork/america/atlanta.htm](http://www.swaminarayan.org/globalnetwork/america/atlanta.htm) or (404) 297-0501.

## What You Need To Know

- Tours are free from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily (for a minimum of 10 people scheduled in advance). A short video explains how the temple was built and provides info about BAPS, the civic and religious organization that worships here. Self-guided tours are allowed from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Everyone must cover their legs when entering the Mandir. Wraps and long skirts with elastic waists are provided in case you forget.
- Remove your shoes before entering the Mandir. Store them in the provided cubbies.
- Shoot your photos before you enter, and then stow your camera. No pictures are allowed inside.
- While the inner space was designed to minimize echo, visitors whisper out of respect for those in prayer.

When you stand before the Mandir, you understand why it took more than a year to build.

