

A Guide to Proposing at the Taj Mahal

by Dan Levesque on May 08, 2017



A few days ago, I got engaged at the Taj Mahal. Here's a little video clip of the aftermath:

Actually, the proposal didn't quite happen at the Taj Mahal. It happened some distance away, across the river at a park on the back-side of the complex. The video above was recorded the following morning, when we actually went to the front side of the Taj.

Here's a step-by-step playback of how it all went down.

Step 1: Planning

Obviously, the first step to popping the question at the Taj Mahal was planning a trip to India in the first place. This trip was a long time in the making and, by the time it all finally came together, we were planning to spend up to two months exploring as much of India as

we could. Our first stop would be New Delhi (thanks to an ultra-cheap flight), followed by a brief train ride to Agra, home of the Taj Mahal.

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but it can do no justice to how amazing the Taj Mahal looks in person. I'm not a huge architecture fan, but everything about it was incredible:



The famous pond in front of the Taj Mahal

Once this first segment of our trip had been planned and the Taj Mahal was on the itinerary, I picked out the ring and booked a pretty decent homestay (sort of like a B&B) near the Taj Mahal—**but not too nice**, so as not to arouse any suspicion of what was to come.

I also made every effort to avoid suspicion when the marriage topic came up. I'd say we weren't ready to get married anytime soon. Or that I didn't want to buy a ring because I

was saving for our trip. And that I'd think about it after our trip was over and we were back in Canada.

The deception got so real that *I even started to believe it*, and sometimes I'd forget that there was a ring hidden away in a drawer just a few feet away from where we were sitting.

Step 2: Keeping the Secret

Something about telling other people about my would-be proposal in advance always seemed wrong. It's supposed to be an intimate moment between two people, so I kept it that way.

Especially with planning a surprise proposal at an international destination (and in a developing country, no less), the stakes were high. As much as I wanted to tell a few of my closer friends that I planned to pop the question while I was away, I couldn't risk compromising the surprise. I told nobody.

Step 3: Smuggling

Since this was a big secret, I had to find a way to hide the ring. I knew that we'd each be carrying a few essential items that the other might want to use at any given time (soap, toothpaste, hand sanitizer, power adapter, towels, and so on), meaning that at any given time she might go searching through my bag for something she needed.

So I hid the ring inside of a band-aid box inside of a small first-aid kit, which itself was in a small bag of other medical-related essentials. I taped around the band-aid box to make it more difficult to open (in case she asked, my prepared reasoning was that it was so stuffed full of band-aids and wouldn't stay shut), and left a second band-aid box outside of the first-aid kit as a decoy.

She never even needed a band-aid anyways.

But one thing I did that I definitely *would not recommend* was hiding the ring, medical-kit and all, inside of my checked luggage. My carry-on bag is quite small, and as our departure date got closer I started getting super paranoid about airport security somehow becoming

suspicious about this hidden ring in my bag, asking me to open it up, and thus ruining everything in the **Vancouver airport**.

That sure would have ruined the surprise engagement:



The engagement ring in front of the Taj

I decided that there was less probability of the airline losing my luggage than of airport security ruining my surprise, so I stuffed the entire medical kit deep inside of my 65-Liter backpack. If anyone wanted to get at it, they'd have to go into my backpack, through two zippers, a ditty sack, and a taped-shut band-aid box that was a pain in the ass to open even with a knife.

And if some thief were able to get that far into an unassuming bag at an airport terminal, I'd say they earned the damn ring. It probably would have been just fine to bring it with me on the plane, but at least everything worked out.

Step 4: Catching the Sunset over the Taj Mahal

During my research, I realized that proposing at the main part of the Taj Mahal wouldn't be ideal for a number of reasons:

- The main complex of the Taj Mahal is super busy and crowded with tourists. There are lineups of people waiting to get their pictures taken in front of the Taj Mahal pond—you know, the same place **everyone else** gets their picture taken when they visit.
- I didn't want this intimate moment being witnessed by over a hundred strangers. I also envisioned Indian guides yelling at us to hurry up when 50 other tourists were waiting in line for their turn to get their picture taken in the exact same spot.
- Security checkpoints, again. You have to go through security in order to get into the Taj Mahal grounds. I was probably being overly paranoid here too, but didn't want to take the risk (it turns out nobody's even paying attention to the bag scanners, even though you **have to** put your stuff through them).
- Videography is not allowed past a certain point. This means I wouldn't be able to set up my little GoPro on a tripod in order to capture the moment—which had definitely been part of my plan all along. There was also the risk that they wouldn't let me bring the camera in, or charge me an exorbitant extra fee to do so.

The alternative to the main complex was to go to a place called Mehtab Bagh. It's a little park on the other side of the river, about a 10 kilometer rickshaw ride away from the front gate of the Taj Mahal.

It was a terrible drive. The heat was sweltering, dust filled our eyes, and we got caught in a traffic jam for over twenty minutes. She was miserable and I was nervous.

But once we arrived, we were within about 300 meters of the Taj Mahal, with an unobstructed view of the back-side. The orange glow of the impending sunset had already started transforming the ivory-white marble into a glowing orange.

Step 5: Framing the Photoshoot

I had expected Mehtab Bagh to be quieter than it was. There were a decent amount of people there to watch the sunset; but not too many to ruin the proposal.

After we sat and watched for a few minutes, I suggested we go to a big open area behind where everyone else was and set up the GoPro to get a few shots of us in front of the Taj. Photoshoot time was underway.

Luckily, this little DIY-photoshoot aroused no suspicion at all. For months, I'd been using the GoPro on almost every hike we went on trying to get good shots of us and the scenery. It didn't always work out well, but it was good practice for this moment.

I would've liked a better camera, but the GoPro is conveniently small, durable, and affordable; perfect for traveling with. So I unfolded the mini tripod, framed the Taj Mahal, and started taking pictures.



Asking her to marry me

I messed it up a little bit. We weren't exactly centered on the Taj, but in my defense I was super nervous.

Earlier that day, I'd hidden the ring inside of a tissue packet in my pocket, but hadn't been able to feel the ring through my shorts since then. All I could do was hope that everything was good to go.

Step 6: Popping the Question.

The camera was rolling. I suggested we do something cute for the camera, so we spent a few seconds (or minutes, I'm not sure) trying to get a few Facebook-worthy pictures.

Then I started searching my pocket for the ring. Couldn't find it anywhere.

I was semi-panicking. The camera was rolling. She wasn't too keen on doing a photoshoot in the first place. I was acting strangely. My cover was about to be blown.

I was literally ripping through tissues in my pocket looking for this damn ring. Then I felt it. And I said a few things.

And she said YES!

We hung around for a little bit afterwards. The sun went down. We went back to our homestay, and debated whether or not we should bother going to the Taj Mahal main entrance for sunrise.

Step 7: Sunrise at the Taj Mahal

It would have been a huge mistake not to. We left our homestay at around 5:00 to make the 5:30 sunrise. It was a convenient 20-minute walk from where we were staying.

By this point, it hadn't really sunk in yet that we were engaged. But we started coming to terms with it as we explored around the Taj Mahal grounds.

Sure, it's just a building. But there really aren't words to describe the place. The back and the sides are nice, but the full-frontal view of the Taj Mahal up-close is awe-inspiring. It was hard to leave, even after a few hours. It's not something that can be described. It just needs to be seen in person.

It was lucky that I didn't attempt the proposal in the main entrance, because it would have ruined the experience of the Taj Mahal. We had the most beautiful building in the world at arms-length, and that in itself is a lot to take in. Getting engaged in the same day would have been too much.

It was nice to take the time to roam around and fully enjoy the experience of being there. Having witnessed both the sunset and the sunrise, I think the Taj Mahal represents a new beginning. One we haven't fully come to terms with yet.

Here we've started two new journeys: one for the heart, and one for the soul. Time will tell what fruit they will bear.