



# Tour Bangladesh: Starting in Dhaka

**I**NSTEAD of speaking vainly of the numerous tourist attractions of Bangladesh, we decided to take an actual tour of the country. We will follow (more or less) the package tour options provided by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation. We will present the actual itineraries and price lists provided by Parjatan.

Tour operators say that the most popular tourist attractions are Sundarban, Rangamati, and Sylhet. Cox's Bazaar is more of a domestic tourist spot and does not hold as much charm for the foreign visitor. The busiest tourist season in Bangladesh lasts from October through March.

by Gemini Wahhaj

So are the secret underground rooms that were building for hiding in case of attack. Rumor has it that the rooms were closed after several visitors lost their way underground. The secret staircase that leads to the secret rooms is still open.

The governor's house boasts an audience hall, the Hammam or bathroom, and some interesting historical objects. The ancient swords, guns and war outfit give the visitor a sense of the danger that once surrounded the now peaceful fort. The Hammam consists of a huge bathing platform, boiler rooms for heating the water, a dressing room, and other chambers of dubious purpose. A lack of signs leaves the curious visitor unsatisfied. The audience hall upstairs displays Mughal coins and family portraits.

The Ahsan Manzil Museum also overlooks the Buriganga. The pink majestic building consists of thirty-one rooms and a dome that can be seen for miles around. Once the house of Dhaka's Nawab, it has recently been turned into a museum boasting twenty-three galleries to display the Nawab's family portraits, furniture and household items.

The Bara Katra and Chota Katra, located 200 yards from each other, are two important remains of the Dhaka's Mughal rule. The enclosed quadrangles were built in 1644 and 1663, respectively, and served the purpose of caravan serais.

Before the coming of the Mughals, Sonargaon was the capital of Bengal. Before the 13th century, it was the seat of the Deva Dynasty. After that it served as the Sultanate of Bengal's subsidiary capital until the advent of the Mughals. Located 29 km from Dhaka, it also holds several shrines and a beautiful mosque in Goadi village. But most of all, Sonargaon is worth visiting for the combined history of its period architecture and its regal past.

The best known and most well-preserved national monuments are of course the Central Shahid Minar in Dhaka

and the National Memorial in Dhaka. Both premises are the site of many cultural functions and gatherings, which bring back vivid memories of the fight for independence.

## Lunch Break at the Water Front

The Water Front Restaurant at Zia International Airport is owned by Parjatan. Although marked a tourist spot, it is more popular with the younger local population. The restaurant sits on an island. To get to the premises, we had to cross a small bridge. The food selection ranged from teenage favourites like burgers and

chicken sandwiches to traditional Bangladeshi snacks like Samosa. We could sit inside the restaurant or outside, by the water. The third option was having kabab on the boat. We chose to sit inside and watch the people around us. One giggling group of college students had brought a camera along. After lunch, we sat under one of the umbrella shades near the water. There was a nice breeze over the water, and we talked happily for hours. Other people had gone for walks in the tree-lined strip around the lake. But the most popular sport at the Water Front is a boat ride over the water. The ride is Taka 20 per person, and an extra Taka 20 for a hired rower.

## Pleasure Cruise on the Shalook

The M. L. Shalook pleasure craft started operations on November 18. The 72-seater boat boasts double-bed cabins, a central sound system, its own kitchen, and a cultural program.

The Shalook offers two regular rides. On Friday and Saturday, a five hour ride starts at 10 a.m. The charge is Taka



Cultural function on the Shalook — Parjatan

500 per person and Taka 300 for children under 12 years. Services include coffee and snacks in the morning, a buffet lunch, and a live cultural show. Guest are picked up from Hotel Abakash at 9 am, Sonargaon at 9:10 am, and Sheraton Hotel at 9:15 am.

On weekdays, the morning cruise starts at 10 am and the afternoon cruise starts at 3 pm. Both cruises are two hours long. The price is Taka 250 per person, for a minimum of 12 people. Services include a round trip to Pagla V.I.P. jetty, light snacks, and a guide.

For further information about the cruise, call the Tour Division head office at 327842 and 817855-9, or Dhaka Sheraton Hotel at 509479 or 863391.

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# A Cultural and Culinary tour of Calcutta

**C**ALCUTTA grew some 300 years ago on the villages of Kalkut and Sotanul. It was a major trading centre of the world in those days. Greeks, Armenians, Chinese, Turks and Persians travelled to this city in search of trade and commerce, a lot of whom even settled and became Indian citizens. The British Raj carbon copied London's plans for Calcutta.

If you stroll along the sidewalk of the maidan and gora marth (field) you will notice buildings along the Chowringhee road resembling those in London such as Harrods in Knightsbridge.

Although Calcutta is a dirty and overcrowded city, the potential of this city in terms of art, antique treasures and cuisine is beyond imagination.

The many art galleries are an old phenomenon in Calcutta, compared to Dhaka where they are a relatively new trend. Gallery 88 is currently the most popular. Others worth visiting include Birla art gallery, Fine Arts gallery and Chitrakoot. Regular exhibitions are held involving the likes of Paritosh Sen, Sunil Das, Vikash Bhattacharjee, Prokash Kamarkar and Jogen Choudhury.

The Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Calcutta, in consonance with the city's artistic character opened a modern gallery at its premises last year. Many of the West Bengali artists mentioned

by Ruksana Hossain

above as well as Mohammed Kibria, Hashem Khan, Mahmudul Haq and Samarjit Ray from Bangladesh, had the unique opportunity to participate in an art camp held at the Deputy High Commission in February 1993.

The Calcutta antiques scene is not to be missed either. The Streets of Mullick Bazar and Wellesley are full of old furniture and antiques next to the collection of antiques like Victoria, Chowringhee and Russell Exchange on Park Street. Most of the pieces are bought by the Bombay based merchants to be shipped abroad for higher prices. The Chinese vases that reach from the floor to the ceiling of the old building are flabbergasting. A price tag reads Rs 50 lakhs.

There is a Persian merchant located behind an art gallery on Park Street. Apart from vases the collector has prices of jade and ivory given as gifts from Burma, China and Indonesia, fabulous pieces of teak furniture that belonged to the Tagore family and some rare paintings.

If you travel to Calcutta, one mandatory stop should be the collections of Raja Mullick at the marble palace located in the old parts of Calcutta. A few generations of collections now form a museum. Rana Mukherjee, who belongs to an old merchant family, has a

collection worth seeing as well. It is located next to the US embassy on Middleton Street.

After a busy day of art gazing and antique hunting, nothing can be better than a delicious dinner. Calcutta lags behind Dhaka where Thai food is concerned, but the quality of Chinese restaurants there is far better than anything in Dhaka. The popular and affordable People's Chinese Restaurant, Tangra, is well worth trying out for their authentic dishes. The foul smell from the tannery next to the eatery doesn't detract from the experience.

If these olfactory thrills appeal to you, the major hotels in Calcutta like the Taj Bengal and the Grand also have excellent restaurants. China Bowl on Southern Avenue is recommended, although the low ceiling and small space may be claustrophobic.

Mughal food restaurants are very popular. Smaller places like Rohimania and Amenia are fabulous for chap bhaja, biryani. Otherwise, Amber and Siraji also serve authentic Mughal food.

The Indian government should spend more money on this city to restore some of the old buildings and maintain Calcutta as an historic place. It is disheartening to see older houses being replaced by bland modern structures.

Itinerary		
Day	Programme	Remarks
Day-1	Arrival Dhaka Airport and Transfer to Hotel Lunch & Rest at Hotel Afternoon — Dhaka City Sight Seeing Tour Dinner & Overnight, Dhaka	By Parjatan Transport
Day-2	Breakfast Leave Dhaka for Sonargaon Visit Ancient Capital of Bengal (Dep. For Mary Anderson (Floating Restaurant of Parjatan Corporation)) River Cruise in Buriganga Lunch at Mary Anderson Afternoon — Return to Dhaka Dinner & Overnight, Dhaka	By Parjatan Transport By Motor Launch
Day-3	Breakfast Leave Dhaka for Savar (32 km. from Dhaka) to Visit the National Martyr's Memorial Return Hotel Lunch Afternoon-Free for Shopping Dinner at Hotel Transfer to Airport for Onward Journey.	By Parjatan Transport

With Stay in Dhaka at	Tour price per person in US Dollar Sharing twins for group of		
	3 Pax	10+1 Pax	20+1 Pax
Sonargaon Hotel	560	500	450
Dhaka Sheraton Hotel	500	450	400
NTO Hotel Abakash	250	200	170
White House Hotel	250	180	150

## Dhaka: Archeological Monuments

For a hundred years, Dhaka city was ruled by Mughal governors and viceroys. These noble architects decorated the city with many palaces, mosques and shrines.

The Lalbagh or Aurangabad fort, for example, was built by Emperor Aurangzeb's son Mohammad Azam. The prince never finished building the fort. The Nawab Shaista Khan

then took over the prince's unfinished work, but he too abandoned the project when his daughter Pari Bibi died.

The Lalbagh now overlooks the Buriganga in Old Dhaka. It is a perfect rectangle enclosed by high walls and two impressive gateways on the northeast and southeast corners. Inside is a beautiful garden, a pond, a small mosque, the governor's house and Pari Bibi's tomb.

The building of Pari Bibi's tomb is closed to the public.

## An Afternoon with the Birds and the Fish

by Saifa Rashid

**A**n attractive bird and fish exhibition was held at the Rent-a-car complex of Parjatan on the 4th, 5th and 6th December. Parjatan corporation arranged the exhibition in honour of Tourism month which lasts from 15th Nov. to 10th Dec.

The exhibition was attended by many people from all walks of life and was most crowded in the afternoons and evenings. There was a five taka entrance fee which I thought was unnecessary especially since the last exhibition was free. Of course they didn't charge me (mainly due to the presence of my editor) but I still think the exhibition should have been free to all.

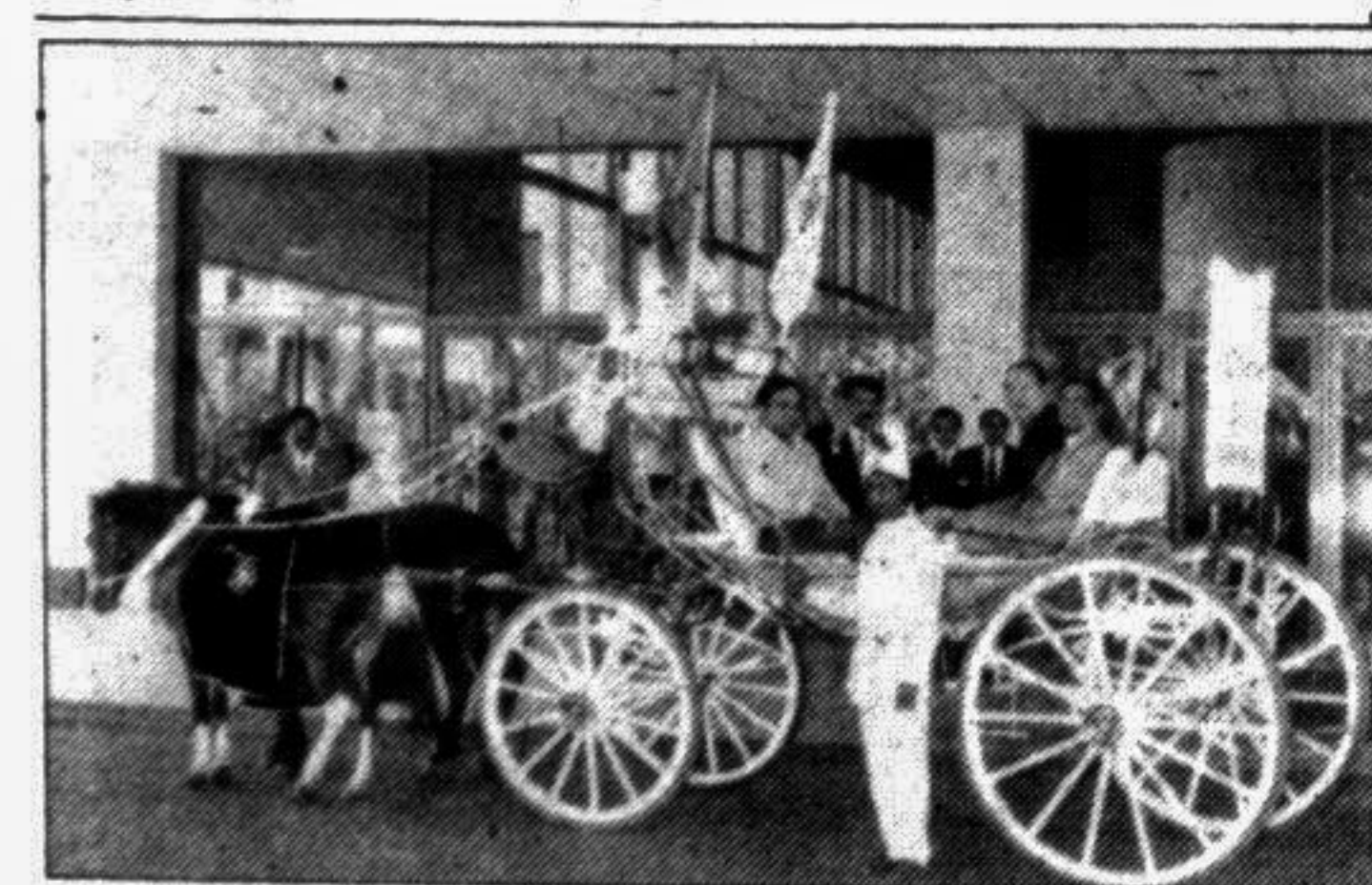
Most of the birds and fish were supplied by pet-shops in the Kataban area near Dhaka University. The bird enclosure was shrill with the shrieks of many birds talking at the same time. At first my eyes fell on the glorious plumage of the fan-tailed pigeons.

In order to admire the birds and question the attendant about their habits and nature, I drew closer. Obviously, the admiration wasn't mutual because one of the birds suddenly launched itself at my head. No amount of shaking would dismount it and I retreated in ignominy. My editor had fled already and though she swears she was attacked too, I don't believe a word of it.

turned our attention to the caged birds. There were hill Mynahs in abundance. One of them could say "Mynah", another "I love you" and yet another "Khaleda Zia, good morning". Many of the birds such as fisher love birds, golden pheasant, finch, parakeet, budgerigar, and Australian football were foreign, mostly Australian. There were also Bangladeshi birds such as mynahs, bulbuls, doves, kites and peacocks. There were even caged crows and sparrows. The most beautiful birds were the kalin birds with grey, blue, and purple plumage. The most colourful birds were the rainbow lorries. The stall of the green lover's cornet was the most imaginative. The birds wandered amongst an enclosure of plants which was wired to prevent their escape.

The fish selection also presented a dazzling array of fish. The various types of aquariums were noteworthy. The most varied display belonged to a fish collector, Zafar Ahmad. He exhibited fish like piranha, gourami, angel, turtle, oscar, red prawns, marine fish, shark, and fancy carp. One tank was devoted to Bangladeshi fish like katla. However, many of the stalls were empty which gave the section an unfinished look. The fish section was definitely less inspiring than the birds section.

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Dhaka city tour by Horse Cart

— Hotel Sonargaon

**T**HE new brush wing logo has an Asian touch. The brushstrokes were created by two Hong Kong Artists, calligrapher and painter Tsze Wei Chan and illustrator Annie Lee. To ensure consistency, all the brushstrokes will be produced in Hong Kong.

## Cathay Pacific Changes Logo

by staff correspondent

The airline's new logo is part of a larger campaign to create an impact in the Asian market. The airline is spending marketing dollars in Asia on innovative advertisements specially geared toward the Asian customer. The new brushstroke, used in all print advertisements, is deliberately Asian, personal, and impossible to mass-produce. It is said to represent the special human touch of Cathay Pacific.

## Gulf Stop in Oman

by our correspondent

**A**FTER travelling by Gulf Air several times between London and Dhaka, I just realized how many wonderful stops the airline makes in the middle east. The Gulf stops in Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Doha, and Muscat(Oman). But I have never made the effort to get a visa and step outside to explore these places. Here is a description of Oman, so that another traveller may feel inspired to seize the opportunity.

Oman lies between the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. The country is bordered by the United Arab Emirates on the west, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. It's landscape ranges from lush green lowlands to spectacular mountains.

The country's capital Muscat is also an age-old port conveniently located at the entrance to the Arabian Gulf. In fact, Muscat means anchorage.

If you are in Muscat, visit the Mirami Fort which sits atop a mountain. The Omanis built the fort, but the Portuguese made additions to it during their rule from 1507 to

## Ticket to the US

**T**HE following is a list of airline fares for students flying to the United States from Dhaka. Since most students enter the US through New York or Los Angeles, fares were compiled for only these two cities. We also listed only the six most frequently used airlines. All ticket prices are

valid through December only. Add a tax charge of Taka 864 for one-way fares and Taka 1,266 for roundtrip fares. Our information was supplied by Far East Aviation. Travel agents may charge different commission rates, but the basic fare will remain the same across agents. — G. W.

Dhaka/New York				
Carrier	Stops	OY(Taka)	RT(Taka)	
Biman	None	30,388	50,071	
Gulf	Gulf	24,150	40,250	
Emirates	Dubai	26,162	52,325	
British	London	30,188	50,828	

Dhaka/Los Angeles				
Carrier	Stops	OY(Taka)	RT(Taka)	
Singapore	Singapore	27,934	55,868	
Cathay	Hong Kong	27,129	54,257	
Thai	Bangkok	27,088	53,372	

## Dubai signs Memorandum of Understanding with the Comoros

**T**HE president of the Dubai Department of Civil Aviation H H Sheikh Ahmed recently signed a memorandum of understanding between the government of Dubai and the government of the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros for air services between the Emirates and the Republic.

The memorandum of understanding allows the national carriers of Dubai, Emirates, and the Comoros to operate commercial flights on the route.

Sheikh Ahmed commented: "This memorandum of understanding is significant because it will pave the way for business and tourism links between Dubai and the Indian Ocean territories. The agreement means that Emirates has a viable option to operate in the Comoros in the near future."

Maurice Flanagan, Group Managing Director of Emirates said: "We are very pleased to see this memorandum of understanding signed and we shall now be actively reviewing the potential for operating services between Dubai and the Comoros." — Courtesy: Emirates

## Kunming: Lakes, Temples, and a Forest

**K**UNMING is the capital of Yunnan province, which borders Vietnam, Laos, Burma, and Tibet. The city is known as Spring City because of its temperate climate. The city was built in 1832. It grew in economic and strategic importance after the opening of the French Indochina Railway in 1910.

Just south of the city, Dianchi Lake is the sixth largest lake in China. Surrounded by parkland and overlooked by hills, it is a beautiful setting. Yuanlong Park lies at the foot of Yuanlong Hill and surrounds a 13th Century Buddhist temple.

A little west of the city, a rhinoceros is said to have turned into a bamboo tree. The Bamboo temple is built on that mystical spot. It contains many pieces of historic Buddhist statuary. To the northeast of the city lies the Green Lake, a willow-lined body of water. Surrounding the lake is a parkland with walkways, a temple, flower gardens and meadows where 'tai chi' exercises take place at sunrise.

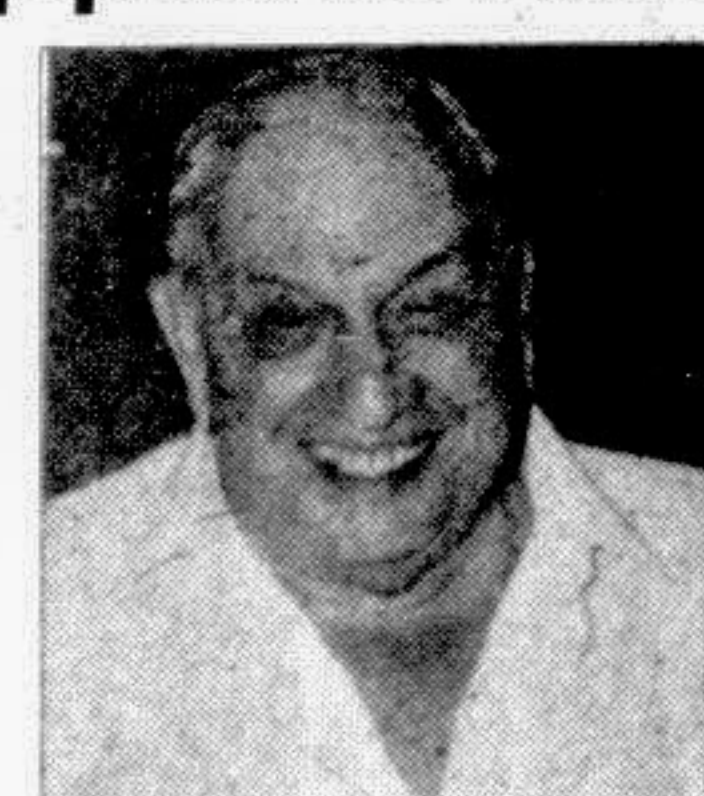
The Golden Temple lies northeast of Kunming, on top of a hill, and is actually made of copper. The Stone forest is a breathtakingly scenic area. It contains curiously-shaped limestone peaks and many gorges. — Courtesy: DragonAir

## Air India Appoints New Chairman

**M**R Russi Mody has assumed charge as Chairman of Air-India Limited effective November 9, 1994.

Born in Bombay on January 17, 1918, Mr Mody is an Arts (Honours) graduate from Harrow & Christ Church, Oxford. He has had a distinguished career in leading industrial houses in the private sector in India and abroad. Till recently he was Chairman of the Tata Iron and Steel Co Ltd and other companies of Tata Group of Industries. Mr Mody is a well-known corporate personality in India. Managing people is his forte.

He is a member of many national committees in India. In recognition of his outstanding work in various fields, Mr Mody has received many honours and awards, including the "Padma Bhushan" Award presented by the Government of India in 1989 for his achievements in the field of Private Sector Management. He was declared India's Best Chief Executive in an opinion poll conducted by Business World and has featured amongst the six top Industrial Personalities of the world chosen by the BBC for their TV serials titled "Money Makers". He was awarded the Fellowships of the Duke of Edin-



burgh's Award Scheme and World Academy of Productivity Science (WAPS). Norway. He was conferred "Manav Ratna" by Bharat Sevashram Sangh for contribution to community development, national integration and protection of the environment in January 1991; and the "Pride of India" Gold Medal for distinguished services and outstanding achievements by the NRI Institute (USA) at New York in July 1991. Mr Mody has a keen interest in cricket, golf, skiing, amateur flying, reading, bridge, tennis, music and cooking. — Courtesy: Air India

Any suggestions about the page should be directed to Gemini Wahhaj, c/o The Daily Star. Contributions about experiences in Chittagong, Rangamati, or Cox's Bazar will be specially welcomed.