



# Travel & Tourism

## The Old Man and the Banyan Tree

by Md Shafiqul Alam

LAST time I went there I met him under that mighty tree. He told me some fascinating tales relating to this great banyan tree. He told me its history - the all too important history of a two hundred and fifty year old tree.

"You know, you won't believe me but when you'll be back to see it over and over again you'll remember me at that time," he told me. I, for my part, didn't believe the better part of his story. For six and a half years I didn't return to see the old mighty banyan tree under which I met that mythic figure and his mythical Olympus mountain.

"He told me that when he would die his fellow-villagers would bury him, beside or under this tree. This time I didn't find him alive; his burial ground was nowhere near that old tree. They, the villagers were astonished to know that I had known Jainal Ali Sirker. They told me that after his death the villagers were divided over where to bury him.

The big morol of Suitola and Mollickpur at long last decided that his remains would rest in peace beside the grave of his parents. I felt a little sorry for him.

Actually, I wasn't back to see him. He might be a mythic figure, but I had returned to see that tree - the old banyan tree, supposedly the biggest and greatest in the world spanning over twenty bighas of land.

It has forty major branches. The main branch was destroyed by lightning a long time ago. They say that the main one was twenty five

feet in width. Today only a few branches can match its ancestor.

In the middle of the tree, there is a big hole. Some uprooted stems lie idly looking at the sky. No one dares to touch them or carry them to use as firewood. They say that if you dare to take your hatchet to that tree, you'll soon find your hand paralysed for no particular reason. They even gave me some living example. Ramjan of Uttarpara (North hamlet), Hakim Molla of Mohorchand had a similar fate.

A few meters away from the tree, there is a new bungalow without any furnished room. It is enclosed by a big wall. I don't think any tourist could come here to stay a night or two without proper security. In an ambience of ancient setting, a newly built bungalow looks odd. On the right side, there is a bazaar, adjacent to the tree. On Sunday and Wednesday, Suitola-Mollickpur hat buzzes with activities. The inhabitants of nearby villages all come to buy and sell their usual necessities.

Traditionally, the haat is not so popular. You won't find any big shops at the bazaar. Only a few groceries and couple of tea stalls remain open from 9 am to 8 pm. Some straw made huts can be seen hundred meter away from the tree.

Hardly anything other than the big old tree, can stir your attention in that village of Ibn Batuta's time. Jainal Ali Sirker told me that no one lived here, two and a half centuries ago. Then the local Zamindar forced a potter family to start living



Hinduism) used to be there with so many genetical castles and forts on the top.

On realizing that they had been struck by their own living matter, they were persuaded by their philosopher-cum-lawyer-cum-astrologer-cum-king that they had better leave the place right away. They went to a new destination. Some of the villagers, mostly the pious ones at that time heard their moaning and crying.

JAS was at the same time living in the town of Kushtia. Having found that his new business and political friend had cheated him he thought that he would by any means leave the town as soon as possible.

One night he heard a strange female spirit requesting him to come to his own village to look after a tiny little country girl. It continued for several nights. On a holy good Friday he set foot for his country home leaving his everything in Kushtia for good. Soon arriving at his village Suitola-Mollickpur he discovered that the spirit that disturbed him was nothing but the soul of that tree. He found new enthusiasm to start his life afresh.

The tree revealed to him the truth of the art of living, it gave him wisdom. To him she became gaea (or mother). He took the job of telling everyone the story of that tree. His tree.

I tried hard to explore the myth that enshrouds the tree. I could not see its whole body at a time. It had grown a few meter on every side since the last time I had seen it. Maybe

## Travel Briefs

**US, UK airlines sign deal:** The department of transportation has approved an application by Delta Airlines to offer services between seven US cities and London on flights made by Virgin Atlantic Airways of the United Kingdom. In this code sharing agreement announced Feb. 2 Virgin will get an authority for additional flights between the US and London.

**Trio of new commercial jets:** A trio of new commercial jets will be appearing in considerable strength in the Asia-Pacific region over the next 18 months. These aircraft claim greater efficiency, cost-effectiveness and operating flexibility than the classic 'jumbo', though the 747's pre-eminence on high density long-haul routes will continue unchanged for a long time yet.

The new, 300 plus 777 will enter service this year with British Airways, United Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Japan Airlines, Thai International etc.

**World's tallest man joins PIA:** The world's tallest man, Mr. M. Alam Channa, who has recently joined as sports officer, was formally presented a specially designed wheelchair by the managing director of PIA, Air Vice Marshal Farooq Umar, at a ceremony held at the PIA head office.

**Investment Budget for NY port:** The port authority of New York and New Jersey has allotted US\$ 669 million in its budget for 1995 for capital improvements and US\$ 1.6 billion in operating expenses.

The authority's US\$ 2.69 billion budget, which includes no fare increases provides for major investments in its airports, tunnels, bridges, marine terminals and other facilities, said its chair woman Kathleen Donovan.

**Dragonair's new schedule:** Dragonair will be operating flights according to their new summer schedule which is effective from 29th March, 1995. The new timings are as follows:

KA 110	KA 111
Tuesday	Wednesday
Hongkong Dep: 1200 hrs.	Dhaka Dep: 0120 hrs.
Dhaka Arr: 2255 hrs.	Hongkong Arr: 0655 hrs.

This new schedule makes it possible for the passengers to catch same day connections beyond Hongkong.

Dragonair has also introduced special business class fare for DAC/HKG route during the summer schedule.

**Haji flight starts from April 13:** The first Hajj flight of Biman for the pilgrims of this year under the government management, begins on April 13. The last flight to Jeddah will leave Dhaka on April 26. Hajj pilgrims are requested to report three days before their scheduled flights.

**STOL service begins:** The long awaited STOL (short take off and landing) service is likely to begin soon. The authorities concerned have assured that the problems delaying its launching will soon be removed. The guidelines set for the STOL service came under scrutiny at a meeting between the Minister of state of Civil Aviation and Tourism and the PATOL (Provisional Air Transport Operating License) holders.

**Dragonair doubles flight frequency:** Dragonair will introduce two additional weekly flights to the Japanese city of Sendai from April 3, 1995. The additional services will operate from Hongkong on Mondays and Thursdays. The services are subject to government approval.

**Fly KLM free in April '95:** KLM offers the choice of three services a week every Monday, Thursday and Saturday from Dhaka with convenient connection to Middle East, Europe, USA and Canada, effective from 1st April '95.

All passengers holding locally purchased KLM tickets and travelling during April '95 will be entitled for a lucky draw and the winner will travel free. Every flight will have one winner, who will travel free.

**Best employee of January:** The honor for Best Employee for the month January 1995, of Hotel Sonargaon, has been awarded to Stanislaus Rozario. Stanislaus holds the position of 2nd cook in the hotel's kitchen department. He joined the family of Sonargaon Pan Pacific Hotel in March 1983.

## Travel Editor's Note

Oh, to See Dhaka Through Your Eyes!

"Ooh, the Ahsan Manzil is so pretty in pink," exclaims the glamorous ignorant tourist. "What a clever interior decorator!"

"Yeah," agrees the cynical guide, wondering if he should bother to explain the amazing history of the Nawabi palace.

A travel guide is someone any rich tourist would welcome as an add-on. Most international tourist sites stem with them - young college students, glamorous socialites (as pretentious as their tourists), or perhaps boring historians. They can change the whole nature of a visit. A clever amusing anecdote, a beautiful delivery of the poetry of a place, or some intelligent decisions about what a particular tourist would like to see, can make a tourist's day.

Besides being a glamorous add-on, a guide is also very useful of course. Consider a foreigner in Bangladesh, with no command of the Bangla language, and no idea of how to get from here to there. Navigating your way around an unknown place may prove to be pretty nerve-wrecking, and take away from the pleasures of a trip. Most tourists back from France, for example, remember the rude French people and the difficulty in getting around more vividly than the Eiffel tower.

The travel guide is not a popular concept in Bangladesh. Only invited travel writers and foreign visitors get guided tours. Others are mostly left to their own devices. Of course, most people would argue that the best way to see a place is on your own. You can only really know a place when you see, feel, and absorb everything in your own way.

But still, most frustrated tourists are ready for a travel guide, sooner or later. Bangladesh is teeming with people who'll make excellent travel guides. We have our

## In and Around Bangkok

Bangkok is the most popular destination of Bangladeshi tourists. Nahid and Nishat Hussain tell us what to look for when you get there.

AFTER an endless wait at immigration, dodging airport touts offering a taxi ride into town or a pretty girl or boy - you may wonder if it is all a mistake. The run in from the airport through traffic jams and pollution will not dispel those early misgivings - rather it will add to them.

Bangkok is an ugly city sprawling over low-lying land. It has no obvious geographical center but it has a lot of heart. It is a friendly, vibrant place, and so, visitors quickly brush aside the hassles and ugliness.

Bangkok was founded more than two centuries ago on the site now occupied by the Grand Palace, an array of temples and shrines which has been called "a dazzling fairy tale of dreams." The Grand Palace is Bangkok's major landmark. Sightseeing is easy here because most of the popular attractions in Bangkok are located within easy reach of one another.

Inside the Grand Palace complex is Thailand's most famous and sacred Buddhist Shrine - The Temple of the Emerald Buddha. It is so sacred that nobody may photograph the green image made of jasper.

Located near the Grand Palace, Wat Pho, known as the Temple of the Reclining Buddha, is one of Thailand's oldest temples.

A short walk from the Grand Palace is the National Museum where one can study Thailand's history and view rare artifacts. The museum offers daily guided tours on Thai art and culture in various languages.

Jim Thompson's House was the home of the man who popularized Thai silk throughout the world - Jim Thompson. This enchanting home is perhaps the most beautiful house in Bangkok. It is filled with exquisite works of art from Thailand, Cambodia, Burma and China. The garden is an oasis of beauty and peace.

A major riverside landmark, the Temple of Dawn or Wat Arun is a magnificent shrine. It is decorated with glazed ceramic pieces from top to bottom; as a result, the temple literally shimmers in the sun. The most beautiful view of this shrine is at sunset.

Wat Arun is a favourite with tourists, who like to call the temple by its English name. This tends to confuse most Thais because there is another temple with a similar name. Make sure where you are going or you may end up in the wrong place!

Wat Benchamabopit is an unique temple located near Chitralada Palace, the official residence of the present monarch and his family. The temple is known as the Marble Temple because it is made mostly from Correria Marble.

## Come See My Country

Sometime ago, Naseem Huq compiled a wonderful foreign visitors guide to Bangladesh. The Daily Star will run her articles serially. Any comments will be welcome.

BDHGLDSDH is a richly rewarding experience - a land of vivid colours and impressions. You see rivers and land - miles and miles of green land - and ancient traditional culture. Bangladesh is colourful. It is not vast, but it is various. The eye never tires of its beauty. The country is a spectacular assembly of woods, hills, sea and flat land. It has its own birds, beast and trees.

The state is called 'The People's Republic of Bangladesh'. The people of Bangladesh are a friendly, fun-loving and handsome race, yet fiercely independent when challenged to defend their own values.

For hundreds of years the culture of Bangladesh has been subjected to waves of outside influence. The tide of conquest and trade which flowed back and forth over Asia through the centuries have each added to the sum total of religion, art, traditions which are within the mind and heart of every Bangladeshi or 'Bangalee' as they call themselves.

Yet somehow the culture and character of Bangladesh is unique, unlike any of those which have influenced it. Almost larger than life in its pride, richness and vigour.

Nature has blessed Bangladesh with a lavishly generous soil and climate. Water and sun, the twin blessings of nature are here in abundance. The landscape is green and lush, the markets overflowing with brilliant and diverse produce - some things one will



Bangkok, city of Buddhist temples - Swaadee

## Japanese tourists arrive in Dhaka

by Nurur Rahman

DESPITE the expected warm spell, excitement in media over incidents occurred 14 years ago and politics over food shortage a Japanese tourist group happily concluded their visit to Bangladesh after a six day visit to Dhaka, Chittagong, Rangamati and Kaptai. The 14 member group consisted of students, businessmen, retired professionals and housewives. Mr. Fuminori Haegawa, the



The 14 member Japanese tourist group after their arrival at Zia International Airport, on March 19, 1995 - Nurur Rahman