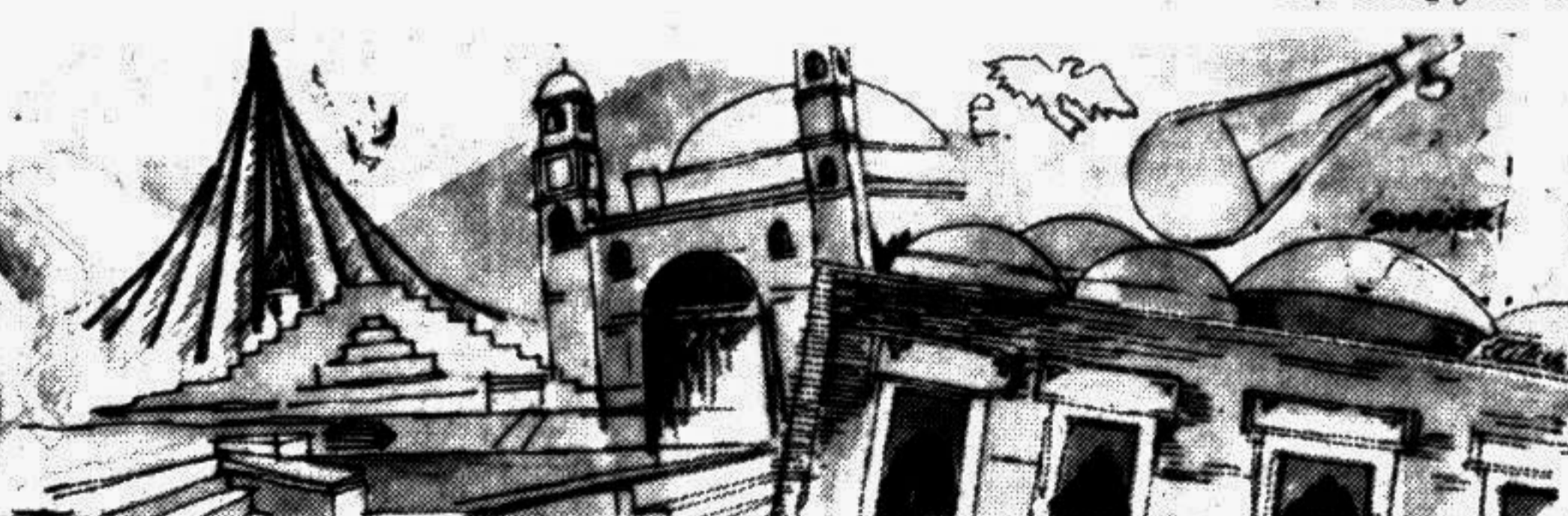




# Travel & Tourism



**T**HAT'S the first thought that struck me, as we reached there. Hundreds of buses honking loudly, throngs of all, the ambience veiled in a dusty blanket, presented a not-so-appealing sight — as far as first impressions went.

When my father announced the mainamati trip, my younger sibling and I were hardly on cloud nine. It was quite unusual, considering the fact that we've never been there and were both curious about ancient civilizations. Then, why? Well, it was the annual department picnic, where the parents (the organisers) coerced their reluctant kids (of all ages) to go. Anyway, this time we didn't throw the usual fuss as we were going to visit Mainamati, the place of the ruins of the illustrious Chandra and Deva dynasty of Samatata. We had heard and read about the famous site, it was about time we saw it ourselves, we decided.

However, what could have been an odyssey full of anticipation, turned out to be too

## Mainamati : A Historic Site or A Picnic Spot?

by Lavina Ambreen Ahmed

**There are around 115 monastic cells and a cruciform temple in the middle. Each 12 sq. ft cell is connected with a narrow verandah. There are three corbelled niches in each of the cell's three walls, which were perhaps intended as receptacles of small lamps or icons. The burnt red clay walls though obviously decayed still look firm and sturdy. Deep digging inside the monastery has revealed six distinct rebuilding phases. The monastery was probably constructed in the early 8th century, during the reign of Raja Bhava Deva, the forth ruler of the Deva kingdom. This was testified by an inscribed clay sealing found during excavation.**

Mainamati had in store for us. Then, when the bus stopped and we saw a signboard saying Kathari, Comilla, we jumped out. Wide eyed we gazed ahead. On the ground covering a vast area stood the Buddhist remains of a bygone era.

Mainamati or rather Mainamati-Lalmaj range is approximately an 11 mile long area of dimpled hills, stretching through the centre of Comilla from north to south. The northern part is known as Mainamati named after King Govinda Chandra's mother, a popular character in local legends and folk ballads. While, the southern part is called Lalmaj or 'red hill', because of the red colour of the soil. Excavations on the range have unearthed about 50 ancient Buddhist sites that trace back to the 8th to the 12th century. The well known sites are — Shalban Vihara, Kutila Mura, Ananda Vihara mound, Charpatra Mura and Queen Mainamati's

still look firm and sturdy. Deep digging inside the monastery has revealed six distinct rebuilding phases. The monastery was probably constructed in the early 8th century, during the reign of Raja Bhava Deva, the forth ruler of the Deva kingdom. This was testified by an inscribed clay sealing found during excavation.

### Kutila Mura

Situated about three miles north of Shalban Vihara, inside the military cantonment, it's a group of unusual Buddhist monuments. However, it was a big disappointment when we couldn't visit the place, as permission inadvertently hadn't been taken.

There is a row of three brick built stupas sitting on an oblong platform with intriguing circular drums and hemispherical domes. According to the book they possibly represent the Buddhist "Trinity" or "three jewels" which are Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. It further informs that the central stupa is in the shape of a "Dharmachakra" or the wheel of law and the complex ground plan of it, somewhat resembles the larger example, Nagarjunikonda stupa in south India. The spokes of the wheel are shown by eight brick chambers. Quite a number of intricate claystone sculptures have been salvaged from their depths. The site is enclosed by an extensive boundary wall with recessed panels and there are three grand staircases on one side, giving access to the shrine. Kutila Mura is definitely one

of the most impressive sites, don't forget to ask permission, beforehand for visiting.

### Charpatra Mura Mound

Also inside the military base is about one & a half miles from Kutila Mura. Exploration has exposed another quite small shrine. Interesting finds at the site include a bronze relic casket and four highly significant royal copper plate grants of the Deva and Chandra rulers.

### Queen Mainamati's Palace Mound

It's located at the northern most part of the Lalmaj-Mainamati range, near the gumti river. The palace remains rested on a hillock, almost 40 ft above ground level on all sides except on one, where the mound can be reached from the main road down below. Its also the place of the derelict garden lodge of Maharaja Kumar Vir Kishore Manikya Bahadur of Agartala State. The remnant of a badly damaged brick wall can be seen today. Some jewellery items were found, but no cult objects have been uncovered, as yet. Till further discovery, it can be assumed that it was the only secular place on the whole range.

### Ananda Vihara Mound

About one & a half miles north of Shalban Vihara and a mile south of Kutila Mura, Ananda Vihara is the largest of all the ancient sites mentioned so far. The massive mound covers an area of approximately a 100 sq. yards. The name (of the site) as the historians believe, derived

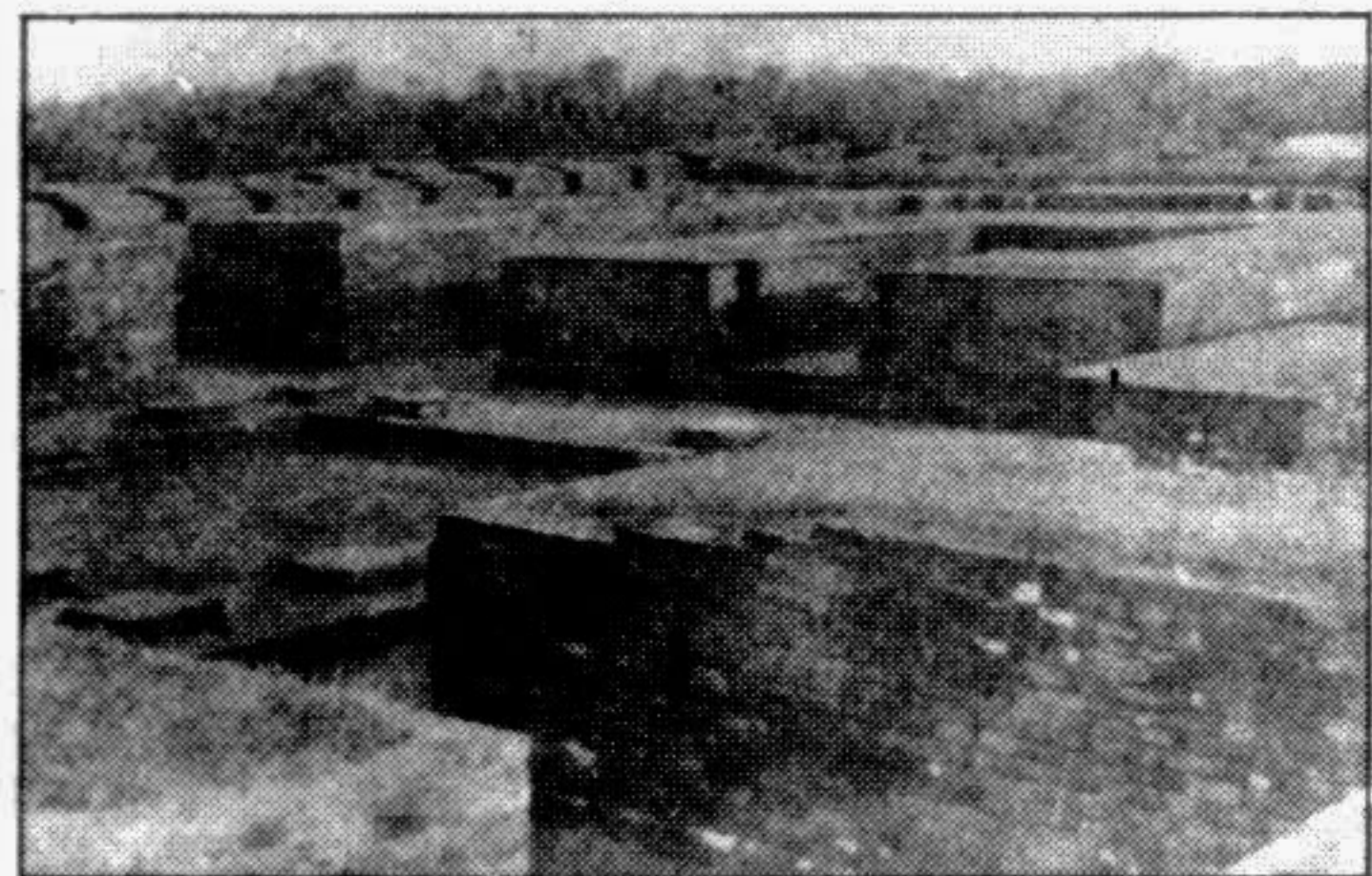
**Culturally, we bangalees generally seem to have an apathy and disregard about upholding our heritage and past. Curiously enough, some of us, only give priority to 'big and tall' historic monuments. Now, Mainamati might have been a big hit with that lot, if instead of the lacklustre mounds and brick walls, there was a grand edifice with elaborate patterns adorning the walls. Even, Sonargaon and Ahsan Manzil manage to hold a crowds interest, albeit for a few minutes.**

from Ananda deva the third and the greatest ruler of the early deva dynasty. The Buddhist monastery at Ananda Vihara is similar in structure to the Shalban Vihara one, complete with a central cruciform temple, the monastic cells and the enclosure wall.

We were a despondent bunch heading towards the museum. Not being able to see much had really ruined the whole purpose of the visit. But there was yet another surprise for us after Juma prayer and lunch. The spoilsports (the senior members) didn't like the idea of waiting in the dusty grounds with the undisciplined masses, hence, the museum tour was cancelled. At that point, we were convinced that our trip was jinxed. So, listlessly we went back to the bus, in search of a cosy spot to stop and have lunch, which turned out to be one of the auntie's relative's house. A beautiful dwelling with a serene backyard and a big pond. But, the

ter. But, from what I have seen, I must say that it's yet another example of how little the concerned people are doing to preserve the spot. (Not unlike most of the other sites). By setting up a museum at the site, they seemed to have washed their hands off the place! However, so much can be done.

Firstly, why not put up signboards at various parts of the sites explaining the architecture? Secondly, booklets and guide books should be available, throwing light on Mainamati's glorious background. This attempt might help the public comprehend the historical value and appreciate the place. Last but not the least legends and folktales could be publicized — a very common ploy to boost tourism. But to be quite honest, the authorities are not the only ones to be blamed. Fault is also ours. Culturally, we bangalees generally seem to have an apathy and disregard about upholding our heritage and past. Curiously enough, some of us, only give priority



The historic ruins of Mainamati — A K M Mohsin

long and tedious. It was the day before Ramadan and the streets all the way from Dhaka to Comilla were occupied with all kinds of vehicles. It seemed that half of Dhaka's inhabitants like us, had set out for a day of fun, keeping in mind the month long abstinence ahead of them. The journey was boring right from the beginning. First of all, we started late, maintaining the standard departure time of the picnic transport. Then, we got stuck in traffic bottle-necks a few times. Throughout the ride my sister and I browsed through our Mainamati guide book, which is actually "Discover the monuments of Bangladesh" by Dr. Nazimuddin Ahmed, a fascinating and comprehensive study of historic places all over the country. As we were nearing our destination, we couldn't help feeling excited and waited with barely suppressed animation for what

palace mound. Deep digging and explorations have revealed many monasteries, stupas and also a rich and interesting collection of stone and bronze sculptures, reliquaries, coins, copper plates, terracotta plaques, jewellery as well as miscellaneous objects of daily need. The discoveries explicitly speak of the remarkable cultural attainment of that period.

### Shalban Vihara

We visited the Shalban Vihara remains. Its a massive 550 sq. ft Buddhist Monastery built in a spacious courtyard. There are around 115 monastic cells and a cruciform temple in the middle. Each 12 sq. ft cell is connected with a narrow verandah. There are three corbelled niches in each of the cell's three walls, which were perhaps intended as receptacles of small lamps or icons. The burnt red clay walls though obviously decayed



Tourists at Mainamati — A K M Mohsin

museum was definitely a great miss. For those who are planning to go to Mainamati, a visit to the museum is an absolute must. It boasts a rich and varied collection of artifacts. Copper plates with inscriptions, gold coins, stone sculptures terracotta plaques, about 150 bronze statuettes and reliquaries and not to mention the fascinating Buddhist images of Buddha, Bodhisattva and other divinities. Among the interesting museum pieces the bronze votive stupa and a huge bronze bell are certainly worth seeing.

By the time we were ready to leave, we were enveloped in dirt and grime from head to toe. People warned us about the overwhelming dust. I regretted not bringing a cap like my bright kid sister and looked ruefully at my navy moccasins, which turned a fawn hue. Oh, well a long shower was due for all of us back home.

After seeing barely half of the sites I can hardly pronounce the trip as "Satisfactory" or a great learning experience for that mat-

to "big and tall" historic monuments. Now, Mainamati might have been a big hit with that lot, if instead of the lacklustre mounds and brick walls, there was a grand edifice with elaborate patterns adorning the walls. Even, Sonargaon and Ahsan Manzil manage to hold a crowds interest, albeit for a few minutes. Sad but true that often enlightened people treat the historic sites as nothing more than picnic spots. Like the obstreperous crowd we encountered back there. Resplendent in their party attire, blaring hindi music emanating from their buses, they seemed poised for a photo session with Mainamati as a perfect backdrop.

History is the pride and glory of every nation, but we are pretty lukewarm on the subject. At least people know about Mainamati; but there are probably many ancient ruins worse off than Mainamati, fading away into oblivion. There's still time for us to shrug off our nonchalance and rescue and restore these national treasures. But, the question is: Do we want to?

**O**NE fine morning we went to Mr Karim's residence to explore the tourism in our country. He took us to his sitting room and started to narrate its history.

During his twenties, he used to go to different unknown places to satisfy his own interests. He loved roam-



Showing the path through a forest

ing around in forests and jungle. He had this strong impetuous inside him which always triggered him to think how to develop these exciting places which could be enjoyed by the common people. But unfortunately, to make his dreams come true was beyond his capability.

One day Mr Karim and some of his friends visited Cox's Bazar. Right on the beach, they saw a Pagoda. They spent a few nights there and took pictures. These things made him very fascinated. Fortunately, at that time, he got the job in the Chief of Field Publicity. A survey team consisting of two West Pakistanis came to seek out places and to find potentiality of tourism in this part of Pakistan. Mr Karim took

## Growth of Tourism: A Personal Account

by Ferdous Hossain and Ahsan Latif

them to different places in his own jeep. When they were returning from Manikgani, they saw a cute girl sitting on a bamboo cottage. They approached the girl and the girl took them inside her house and offered them 'pan' and

resident accepted Mr Karim's scheme and a department of tourism was introduced in East Pakistan.

The director of the department of tourism, Mr.

nally, when we told him about the boy, he gave him a cold look and screamed at him from the top of his lungs and scatted him away from the room. The poor boy, all petrified, ran away, leaving Mr Karim saying that "I hate disturbances when I have serious discussions with anyone." This left us only to wonder how engrossed and enthusiastic he was and how intricately he was involved with tourism. We just exchanged smirks and then resumed talks with him.

Mr Ayub Khan released two Five-year plan budgets under "Department of Tourism — Govt. of East Pakistan." As the scheme should be implemented, assistant tourist officers and other personal recruitment started within three months. He started his project from Chittagong — a place named "Yasmeen Palace" in Jubilee. Then he went for Kaptai — his third target. A Canadian site with

four bungalows and a swimming pool was selected. It had a wonderful and scenic view overlooking the lake. It started as a beautiful lake side motel called "Kaptai Motel" with 16 rooms.

Then to find a good and attractive place in Rangamati he took help from the government. He was offered Deer Park which he liked very much because of the hillocks and other natural beauty. He booked 89 acres of land for his project. 12 acres of this land was used to make the first ever tourist cottage in Rangamati.

A folder containing all the information about the unknown tourist spots was made by Mr Pasha. This was the first guide book of East Pakistan with the picture of a tiger on the cover page. West Pakistan, imitating the east, made similar brochures. This is how a tourist guide book was first introduced in Pakistan. 3000 copies of these guide books were distributed throughout the country.

Then Mr Karim went to Sylhet. He was definite that tourists would be attracted this place for the tea gardens in Srimongol. But there were no cottages or motels where the tourist could come and stay to enjoy their visits. So, he strongly encouraged the tea managers to build a few cottages to attract tourists.

Seeing no initiative from these people Mr Karim himself took up the project. He made his own scheme with funds from the government. A place in the forest was allotted and a two-storeyed furnished restaurant was made. For transportation introduced micro-buses were introduced.

After completing these projects he started moving to the North. He went to Mainamati and requested the archaeological department to build a rest house there. There was also a teak jungle which was later converted into a picnic spot. A youth hostel and a museum was introduced in Bogra. Other places which were developed were Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Tetulia.

Tazzamal Hossain transferred Mr Karim from provisional to central government, so that he could implement the project. On the 31st of January, 1959, a release order was given to Mr Karim in the post of regional tourist officer to East Pakistan. He rented a small room in the shopping arcade of Shabbagh. This was the first tourist office in East Pakistan and was called the "Tourist Bureau". The office lacked the necessary furniture. Mr Karim carried his personal furnitures from his house on his jeep and decorated the office.

He was so engrossed with these discussions that little did he realise that his small working-boy was standing in front of him with the phone (he had an urgent call). Fi-



Mr Karim seen with the crew of the movie "Around the World in 80 days."

## Travel Briefs

**DMD reviews sales in Lahore:** Deputy Managing Director of PIA, Dr. M. M. Shah recently visited Lahore to assess and review the sales activity of the station and look into matters of operational areas, particularly of the PIA traffic, field service, cargo and other travel related problems. He discussed in detail the inspection report of PIA Lahore and emphasised the need for better customer handling at the booking and town offices. — Top Flight

**New brochures from emirates:** The latest series of brochures, marketed under the product line, A world of choice, originates from a single brochure launched in 1993, which covered 24 destinations in the Middle East, West Asia, the far East and Europe. The brochure has since been split into regional brochures as — the Middle East, Asia, Europe, Africa and the Indian Ocean. Brochures featuring special products are also available. These feature winter ski, business options etc. — Emirates

**Thai's new developments:** Thai Airlines chairman, Mr. Amaret Sile-On, held a press conference to announce their recent development. The board of authorities has approved the proposed investment plan for a second maintenance centre project, to be located at Utapao. They have also decided to concentrate in maintaining stringent safety and quality control standards. — Thai

**Best Employee of April '95:** Mr Fazlul Hague has been nominated for best employee of April '95. He is serving at Hotel Sonargaon as telephone operator under the front office department. Mr Huque joined Sonargaon in March 1982 as Junior Telephone Operator. — Sonargaon Tottler

**Switzerland, USA open Sky:** Representatives of Switzerland and the USA have initiated a new bilateral aviation pact which will bring carriers in both countries liberal and wide — ranging traffic rights.

Swissair and its charter subsidiary will be able to fly to any destination in the USA under the new agreement. However, it will not fly to any new destinations on its own just yet. The two carrier already fly jointly between Zurich and Cincinnati — BD Shipping Times

**Capacity of holding points increases:** The capacity in the four holding points for departure of Zia International Airport has been increased to 1,600 for outgoing passengers. The has been done after opening the boarding bridges at ZIA.

The storage capacity in the cargo complex for imports will increase by 30,000 square feet and that for export by another 18,000 square feet.

When the new terminal functions, the number of lounges for VIP's and CIP's will go up to 11. — BD Shipping Times

## Around the World on a Tight Budget

by Fehmin Shoma Farashuddin

Just as I was getting used to speaking French, it was time to move on to Spain. So we made our way to the train station, trying to prepare ourselves for the almost 24 hour journey ahead of us. Official matters taken care of, we made our way to our compartment. Now, in no way were we expecting anything spacious or luxurious, but I must say, at first glance our compartment was rather disappointing. It was a tiny, cramped affair, with bunks in three tiers on both sides of the wall. Given all our luggage and that of the other four inhabitants, there was soon hardly any space to move around. I found myself whimsically thinking of Bangladeshi trains, those same trains that I had once disparaged as having tiny compartments unsuited for travelling.

The journey itself was eventless. We made friends with many other fellow student travellers with whom we exchanged useful information of the places we had already visited and those we intended to. The Spanish countryside that we speeded through was green and lush, although it looked as though the bad weather that had dogged us in Paris was going to follow us through the rest of our journey as well. Miraculously however, the weather cleared up the very minute we crossed the invisible borderline that divides the two countries. Our destination in Spain was Barcelona. Spain was to be Raka's domain, she claimed to speak the language like a local. So I left it in her capable hands to negotiate our way through the country that I didn't know much about.

As it turned out, the youth hostel we were to stay at was very close to the station we had gotten off by mistake, so we thanked the oversight that had made us get off there and made our way to the hostel.

After the vast, cosmopolitan city of Paris, Barcelona seemed almost quaint in comparison. After Every few blocks or so we came across a plaza that gave way to numerous tiny lanes. Entering

one of these, we came across our hostel, which turned out to be on the sixth floor of a ramshackle building without an elevator. So we huffed and puffed our way up the creaky steps and berated ourselves for having brought so much luggage. As expected, the hostel was full of travelling students, who provided us with advice on the best way to see as much of the city as possible in the day and a half we planned to spend there. So, having deposited our luggage in our room, we took off for lunch at La Rambla, this place which looks very much like a sidewalk in the middle of the road, full of restaurants and souvenir shops. The whole place had a very festive air to it. Then we walked to the waterfront and beheld the great Mediterranean Sea, which lay blue and sparkling in the sunlight. Since neither of us were all that familiar with the city, we decided to take a tour on one of the innumerable buses we had seen wheezing through the narrow streets.

Our bus took us through the Poble Espanyol de Montjuic, a showcase of different types of Spanish architecture, the 1992 Olympic stadium and village, the Gothic quarter and various churches and parks.

Our day and night in Barcelona over, we were off to Italy. After a false alarm at the train station, where some German tourists mistakenly told us that our train was already pulling out, we settled ourselves down to enjoy the journey. Our first destination in Italy was a tiny station called Cerebere, which was teeming with students, mostly American. After spending an interminable wait there (and in the middle of the night too), we were finally on our way again. We woke up the next morning to find ourselves zooming along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It was absolutely beautiful, with rows and rows of houses sitting astride the hills towering above the clear, blue waters of the Mediterranean. The only problem was the tunnels.

To be continued