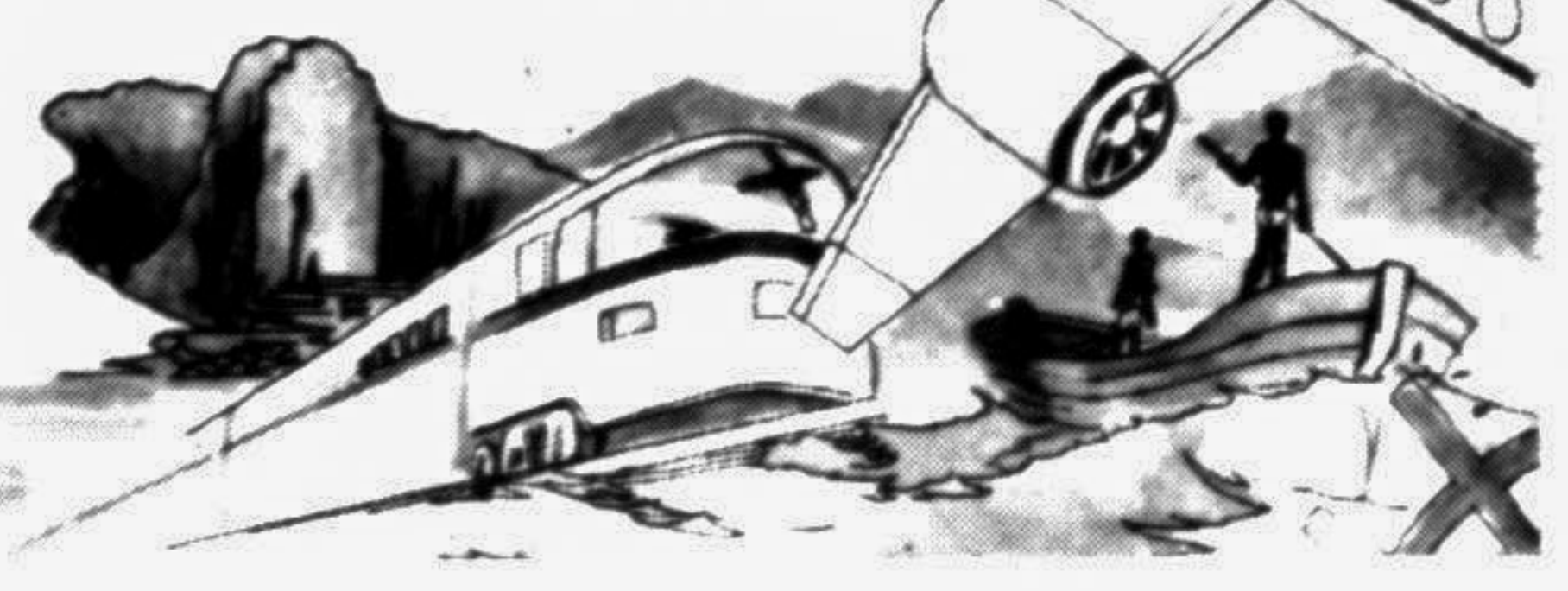




Travel & Tourism



Forlorn Memories of Grandeur

by Ms Naseem Hug

In the natural way that it does time in collusion with the elements has marched on leaving behind only derelict remains of the gifts of a flourishing civilisation that once was in Bengal. Yet today, tucked away here and there across the country are ruins and remnants of archaeological beauty that bear mute testimony to the pomp and grandeur that once thrived and yet, today, are forlorn memories in the shadows of the past.

Many of these edifices built over the centuries no longer remain. Those that do veer sharply in contrast. On one side there are proud, solid forts of the Moghul era such as the fort of Bajigonj towering on the banks of the gentle waters of the Sitalakhya near Narayangonj, built between 1660-63 AD by Subedar Mir Jumla to defend the realm and the populace against the marauding Moghs and the pillaging Arakanese pirates. This was one of a chain of such strategically positioned forts, the others being Sonakanda, further ahead on the eastern shores of the Sitalakhya and Idrakpur, a few miles further south near Munshiganj. Perhaps none of these is as imposing or as familiar as Aurangabad Fort or Lalbagh Fort as it is known today. The fort was never completed following the transfer of its architect Prince Azam, son of Emperor Aurangzeb, barely a year after he had started work on it.

On the other side, the Permanent Settlement of the British Colonial Administration in the late 18th century ushered in a social change in the creation of a new feudal society known as Zamindars. The pride and prejudice, the wealth and grandeur of this class found expression in the construction of some magnificent and massive palaces, Nawab Mansions and Zamindar Houses in Calcutta and Dhaka and many other obscure little towns across the country. Many of these were even built in the unsullied country side and villages canopied by trees in the midst of lush greenery.

The shimmering velvet of the Darbar Halls with their ornate thrones are no longer there, and the cobwebs cover the broken chandeliers in the dance rooms. Yet the ruins

still speak of the affluent lifestyle of those bygone days. There were the exploiter, tyrant and oppressive Zamindar but there were also the benevolent and enlightened ones who cared for the well being of their subjects. They built schools, reservoirs, mosques, temples, roads, inns and memorials. Patronage returned to art and literature, scholars and religious divines were again in great demand. Some of these feudal lords have been lost in the labyrinths of time and history while others are remembered fondly to this day.

The decline of this feudal society began as a result of their own doing; the political changes of 1947 signalled the end not only of the British rule but also of an era of pomp, pleasure and aristocracy.

MURAPARA ZAMINDAR HOUSE
Sited in Murapara in Narayangonj district, this two storied Zamindar house lies about 29 km away from Dhaka city. This huge west facing building with its paired Corinthian columns is in appearance striking. It casts a clear reflection in the deep waters of the tank fronting it. The central porch near the main gateways is surmounted by a triangular pediment built on Greek sculptural models. Its exterior is embellished with plastered floral patterns. It was constructed in 1997.

SHASHI LODGE
This palace is in the heart of Mymensingh town. It was built between 1905 and 1911 by Muktagacha's Zamindar Shashikanta Acharya Choudhury. Crossing the arched gateway with its Doric columns, one comes to an ornamental marble fountain topped by the statue of a nymph. The imposing central portion is supported by Corinthian columns. The elegant kiosks at each corner make this palace look ever more majestic.

HAJIGANJ FORT
The hexagonal Hajigonj Fort is located in Narayangonj

town on the western banks of Sitalakhya river. The fort's high rampart wall has gun-ports of various sizes for artillery pieces. The steep ascent of the fort leads to an arched gateway. This is the only entrance to the structure from the north. Many of the walls in its eastern section have by now caved in. The bastions on the other sides, however, are still intact. This fort was built by Subedar Mir Jumla around 1660-63.

DHANBARI ZAMINDAR HOUSE
13 km west from Modhupur and situated in Tangail district is the family residence of Dhanbari's Nawab Ali Choudhury. The buildings have a projected entrance. Although the residential block is asymmetrical, it offers a pleasing view. The "kutchery" building adjacent to it is beautiful and can even be termed picturesque. The Bangla "do-chala" pavilion supported by Corinthian columns near the outer gateway is evidence of the imaginative nature of the work. On its curvilinear ridge is an attractive "flame" motif. Nearby towards the south east, stands a three domed mosque which is decorated with arabesque work done in porcelain chips. The building was built in the closing years of the nineteenth century.

PUTHIA PALACE
This two-storied palace is located 29 km east of Rajshahi town. Although still imposing it bears marks of the ravages of time. The triangular pediment with two symmetrical projections on the eastern and western end is visually appealing and functional in that it makes the central section of the structure symmetrical. Massive semi Corinthian round and fluted columns support the balcony room. This palace was built by Puthia's Queen, Rani Hemanta Kumari Devi, in 1895 to honour her mother-in-law, Saratsundari Devi's memory.

IDRAKPUR FORT
Idrakpur fort is located in

the heart of Munshiganj town. At one time, the river Ichamati flowed past this fort. The Ichamati, however is a dead river now and silted up at this site. Silt, in fact, has buried the walls of the fort and only the parapets are still visible. The huge drum-like circular rampart can be approached from the west through a concealed flight of stairs. Sitting

building this fort between 1660 and 1663.

TAJHAT PALACE
Built in the first decade of the 20th century, Tajhat palace occupies the southern margins of Rangpur town. This two storied stately edifice can be approached from the east through an imposing broad staircase panelled with

miles north of Dhaka city in Gazipur district's Joydebpur. The two-storied "Rani Mahal" which became famous during the 1030s because of the sensational "Bhawal murder case" is really a semi circular projection on the south of the main place. There are at least 360 suites in this complex which now accommodate the newly set up Gazipur district

are a series of merlons with holes for guns and cannons. The most attractive structure of this fort is the semi-circular bastion on the western side. This was reached through a lofty staircase. The only way to enter the fort is through the north. The level ground within the fort looks like a medieval soccer field. This fort was built by Subedar Mir Jumla around

This palace is situated at the north eastern outskirts of Natore town. This single storied palace is to be approached from the east through a spectacular four storied gateway. Floral decoration done in plasterwork in a series of pointed arches stand out in elegant relief against the facade of the palace.

A huge dome added in 1967 tops the central hall. Built in the last half of the nineteenth century, this palace with its original fittings and furniture intact stands witness to a princely past.

LALBAGH FORT

Once known as Aurangabad Killa, Lalbagh Fort's life began when Emperor Aurangzeb's third son Prince Mohammed Azam ordered its construction after he came to Dhaka as the Viceroy. However, when he was called away from Dhaka a year or so later, his successor Shaista Khan could not complete the construction of the fort. Amongst the remains are 3-storied main gateway at the south east corner, the 2-storied hamamkhana, the tomb of Pari Bibi and the 3 doored mosque on the west of this tomb. Of the function of surviving rampart wall on the south and west with their massive windows which are still intact, we cannot say anything. They remain to us as mysterious ruins.

BALIATI ZAMINDAR HOUSE

About 40 miles north west of Dhaka and in Manikganj District's Baliati lie the sprawling mansions of this region's feudal lords. At one time all five south facing buildings of the complex awed the on looker, but now the structure located at the eastern side has disappeared from view. Of the remaining four buildings, the two terminal ones are three storied and the central ones two storied. The majestic broad frontage with its Corinthian columns reminds one of Georgian country-house. Dhaka's Jagannath University College was a gift of one member of this family, Babu Kishorilal Roy Chowdhury.

This palace was built in the last decade of the nineteenth century.



Construction of the Lalbagh Fort began in 1678 but was never completed.

on top of the drum-like structure is at present the Deputy Commissioner's residence. The imposing circular bastions which are located in every corner of the fort testify to the role played by the fort to ward off Mugh and Arakan raiders in medieval times. Subedar Mir Jumla was responsible for

white marble. This massive building is crowned by a conical dome. At each end of the front facade is a semi-octagonal projection.

JOYDEBPUR PALACE
This picturesque albeit somewhat unusual palace complex is situated about 25

administration. This palace was constructed in the last half of the nineteenth century.

SONAKANDA FORT
The Bandar area on the left bank of the Sitalakhya is the site of Sonakanda fort. In the high rampart walls of the rectangular enclosure of the fort

1660-63.

DIGHAPATIA PALACE
The palace of the Maharaja of Dighapatia is well preserved and protected since it is now the Government House of the Northern region of Bangladesh. It is now known as "Uttara Gano Bhaban".

It rises above the low skyline along Kuta Beach like some huge water tower, or one of those six-storey structures for drying-out fire hoses — and to most observers, that's exactly what this unattractive landmark is. Until, that is, they embark on a tour of Bali's more popular nightspots and end up at the Double Six disco at Legian, a huge, open-sided barn of a place where locals and tourists rub shoulders with gays and working girls to the metronomic beat of rave and electro sounds, and drunken revellers plunge towards a swimming pool attached by bungy cords to what turns out to be the very same tower.

"Like Christians to the lions," my friend, a three-year resident of Bali, laughs cynically. He's explaining, to my astonishment, that the bungy-jumping only begins at the Double Six after 2 am, by which time most of those apparently brave enough to have a go are more likely too far gone to care. Anywhere else on the planet, the police would have closed it down as a safety hazard long ago, but here it's tolerated — or possibly even encouraged — as a valuable tourism asset. Whichever, it certainly puts a very different spin on the still-persistent idea of Bali as the beatitudinous and bewitching island of the gods.

In fact, that rose-tinted notion has been taking something of a battering, not least with the recent pronouncement by an Australian environmental group that the island is being destroyed, both ecologically and culturally, by the human tide of well in excess of two million visitors who arrive there every year. Even the most unobservant of these folk would find it hard not to notice, for example, that virtually the whole of Bali's southern tip, from Legian in the west and Sanur in the east to the Badung Peninsula, has been given over to tourists and the commercialism that inevitably accompanies them. The enormous influx of hard currency over the past 20 years has turned Bali into one of the richest islands in Indonesia, transforming

some lives and landscapes beyond all recognition. Although many villages look surprisingly smart and increasingly prosperous as a result, Denpasar, the capital, has become a traffic-clogged and fume-fogged nightmare, a mushrooming city-of-no-return from which the hapless visitor in his rented Suzuki jeep, sucked in by a maze-like one-way system, is lucky to escape with his sanity.

The beginning of the end for Bali? Possibly — and if you believe the been-there, done-



Village pool at Candi Dasa

that comments of those who visited 20 or 30 years ago, the decline set in the moment those same intrepid travellers boarded the plane home. Even so, the greater part of the island's magnificent natural beauty, enhance and embellished by centuries of human artifice, remains, as transcendently gorgeous as ever, while Bali's unique and resilient Hindu culture, which developed in isolation amid a sea of Islam, remains undiminished in its brilliance. Temples and shrines are as commonplace as houses, the roadsides are lined with brightly coloured prayer flags and bunting, and every day is the occasion for a procession, a ritual dance performance or a shadow-

puppet play at least somewhere in the near vicinity. Granted, Bali has changed immeasurably since the arrival of the outside world and its dollars, but even in the tourist fleshpots of Kuta, tradition continues not as some cultural show staged merely for the benefit of video-toting visitors, but as an integral part of the island's way of life.

Although derided by the politically and ecologically correct, who spurn five-star comforts in favour of more rough-and-ready accommodation, it is often so heavily scarred and potholed that journey times will take far longer than the distances on a map might suggest. That of course, can be turned to your advantage, for this sultry island was never a place to be rushed.

In any case, as there is also a wide variety of accommodation available beyond Sanur and Kuta, ranging from the superb to the merely acceptable, the best idea is to devote a few days to a leisurely roundtrip, stopping in a different place each night. Thankfully, huge discos with bungy-jumping you won't find beyond Kuta, but you will pass through a dreamlike landscape of rice terraces, pavilions and pagodas, deserted sun-drenched beaches, mountain lakes, tropical forests and introspective villages, and meet some genuinely friendly people into the bargain. Even the traffic gets better once the south has been left behind.

The black-sand beaches of Lovina on the north coast have long been a favourite of visitors keen to escape the humdrum commercialism of Kuta, just as surfers and beach bums would head out east to the crashing rollers at Candi Dasa. It's inland, however, that the island is often experienced at its best. A chain of volcanoes forms Bali's central spine, which slopes steeply down to the north coast and more gradually to the south. On the southern side, the rich alluvial soils permit twice-yearly rice harvests from rice paddies that are as intricate and beautiful as the steps in any traditional Balinese dance. This is Bali's larder, and the home of the greater part of the island's population.

For the Balinese themselves, the centre of the universe is the mother temple complex at Pura Besakih, which sprawls over terraces on the lower slopes of Bali's highest mountain, the active volcano Gunung Agung, itself

an object of much veneration. The huge complex of multi-tiered pagodas (meru) dates back more than 1,000 years and is the principal place of pilgrimage for virtually all the population, who come with offerings of flowers and food for the gods and are in turn blessed by the temple priests.

Tourists, on the other hand, tend to make their first pilgrimages in Bali to the temples of Tanah Lot and Ulu Danu, not for any religious purposes but because each in its own way is fabulously photogenic. The former a small temple perched on a rock at the edge of the sea, has become something of a landmark, but apart from its photographic possibilities it has little else to offer. Located 30km or so from Denpasar, it's best visited late in the day and at high tide, when the rock on which it stands is often battered by huge cresting rollers.

Rather more rewarding, however, is the drive north to Lake Bratan and Ulu Danu, which can be made as an afternoon's excursion or as part of an extended roundtrip to the north coast. If starting from Nusa Dua or Sanur, this usually involves negotiating the Denpasar one-way system, but once free of that it's an easy uphill run through rice terraces and pretty upland villages to Candi Kunung on the lakeshore. Stop on the way at the moated, 19th-century temple Taman Ayung at Mengwi, with its towers, courtyards and pagodas, as well as extensive and very beautiful landscape gardens.

Some 50km north of Denpasar, Lake Bratan sits in a huge volcanic caldera and is not only the setting for the lovely Pura Ulu Danu, a classic Balinese vista blending mountain, water and pagodas, but also the informal and peaceful Taman Raya Botanical Gardens, with its growing collection of upland flora.

Beyond Bratan lies the 18-hole course of the Bali Handara Kosaido Country Club, one of the highest-rated and most beautifully situated in Asia, where refreshment and cottage-style accommodation can be enjoyed as well as a round of golf. (If the latter alone is your aim, direct helicopter transfers to the course can easily be arranged at most hotel tour desks.) From here it's a steep downhill run to Bali's former capital, Singaraja, which, now that the island's focus has shifted to the south, wears a rather tattered, down-at-heel air compared to the nouveau riche brasserie of Denpasar. Its near neighbour, the black-sand Lovina Beach, is a favoured haunt of backpackers and other off-the-beaten-trackers, who rest up in inexpensive lodges, dine on cheap seafood feasts, turn in early for a blissful night's sleep by the water's edge — and get up at the crack of dawn to watch the dolphins at play in a placid sea.

Some 30km east from Singaraja along the north coast road is the turn-off leading to Bali's other celebrated volcanic caldera which encloses Lake Batur. It's a long, steep climb up a road which first gently rises through lush tropical vegetation and finally ends up snaking through mountain pine and temperate ferns. Near the summit is Pura Tegah Koripan, the highest temple on the island, and the market town of Kintamani on the lip of the crater. The clutch of temples by the roadside beyond Kintamani includes Pura Batur, one of the most important in Bali. Perhaps the best spot to enjoy the view, however, is over lunch at the Lake View Restaurant and Cottages, a few kilometres along at Penelokan. The active volcano Mount Batur, which last erupted during the '70s, commands centre stage with the lake lying peacefully beneath it. Its eastern shore hard up against the precipitous side of the caldera.

Extracted from Business Traveller

The Backroads of Bali

by Jonathan Wall

Travel Briefs

CPA, Airbus on plane design: Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Airways said it is working the Airbus Industrie on the design of the A340-8000 long-haul aircraft. Cathay has had input into the design of the A340-8000 aircraft. — *BD Shipping Times*

India clears joint venture: The Government of India has officially approved a proposal of the UK-based Hinduja Group, to set up, in association with Lufthansa Cargo, an independent cargo airline based in India. The new joint venture is to be promoted by Ashok Leyland Ltd, the flagship company of the Hinduja Group with head offices in Madras. — *BD Shipping Times*

Airline GSAs form federation: A total of 87 airline general sales agents, known as GSAs, from 21 countries on five continents attended the first general meeting of the Federation of Airline General Sales Agents (FAGSA). They were unanimously in favour of the bylaws and the first four articles, which set out the basic objectives of the organisations; which are — promotion of the interests of the GSAs and quality in the profession; establishment of high quality service by its members etc. — *Monitor*

ALPA elects new officers: The master executive council of the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) elected three new officers in October. The new officers begin their term in January. — *Passages*

Airline News: Air France signed a contract to provide overhaul and repair support for 12 CF6-50C2 engines for Biman Bangladesh Airlines. The three year contract is worth an estimated \$ 30 million.

Sochata won a contract to provide maintenance support for CFM 56-3C engines powering Istanbul Airline's fleet of six B737-300s. The four-year contract will provide the support arm of French engine-manufacturers Snecma with an average workload of four or five engines a year. — *Asian Aviation*

ZIA renewing itself: Zia International Airport (ZIA), after getting a facelift in the form of a glistening terminal building and new boarding bridges, is renewing itself from within.

Immigration process has been made quicker, the luggage belts have been extended and luggage scanners have been set up. The arrival and departure lounges look cleaner and influx of undesirable outsiders have been reduced. — *Monitor*.

Hotel Agrabad's GRM: Old Fujian Ex Lt. Md. Aziz Ahmed Chowdhury has joined Hotel Agrabad as its Guest Relation Manager (GRM). Before coming to the present assignment he used to serve as manager in different private organisations. — *Monitor*.

Zim Weekly to Black Sea: The Haifa-based Israeli shipping line Zim has upgraded its service between Israel and Odessa. In future, it will call at the Black Sea port weekly (Tuesdays) instead of fortnightly as formerly. Zim has just ordered three more 3400 TEU containerships at the Howaldts werke Deutsche Werft (HDW), realising an option following an order for five such ships in 1994. — *BD Shipping Times*