

RAFFAT BINTE RASHID

TIME out



WITH summer lazily giving way to the monsoon season, with the exams over and schools closing, and the prospect of a long, lazy holiday ahead, the soul longs for a change of scenery. One wants to stretch one's boundaries and visit places one has never been in before. Now, while a trip to Bangkok or Hawaii would be nice, let's face it. How many of us can afford it, both in terms of finances and time? However, why should you let that stop you from taking a breather and doing a little travelling?

The Guide Tours Ltd. has some convenient travel packages that you and your family can avail for a quick weekend trip to one of several destinations, all within Bangladesh, and all within a reasonable budget.

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF SYLHET

There are two weekend sightseeing packages that take you to Sylhet.

The trip begins on Friday. You board the Sylhet-bound inter-city Parabat Express train from Kamalapur Railway Station in Dhaka at 6:40 AM. As part of the package, seating accommodation is reserved for you in the Shovan class.

Upon arrival of the train at Srimongal Railway Station 12 noon, you will be received and transferred to the guesthouse or the tea resort, both managed by the Bangladesh Tea Board. After lunch the Guide Tour representative shall take you to visit places of interest, like the tea-plantations, tea factory, Bhanugach Forest, Khasia Punji (village) / Monipuri village, local markets, rubber plantation



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All three packages arrange for your arrival at Bandarban, after which you are transferred to the Hillside resort. The trip to Chimbuk starts after lunch, and on the way back, there is a stop at Shailapropat, a place of pleasant scenic beauty and river rapids. Located around here is a village where the people of the Bawm tribe live.

The first package takes you to Bandarban via the non a/c public chair coach service S. Alam. This includes a visit to the Bandarban town, sight-seeing at the Meghla, a tourist centre run by the local administration, and an overnight stay at Cox's Bazaar, ending in the evening after a day of fun and frolic on the beach.

The second package takes you to Bandarban by the inter-city train Mahanagar Provati leaving from Kamalapur Railway Station in Dhaka. Seats will be reserved for you in the Shovan class. After the trip to Chimbuk and Shailapropat, you get to trek all the way to the Sangu River and visit the Hatibhanga village to see the Tipra tribe. After breakfast on the third day, it's back to the Chittagong Railway Station to take the afternoon inter city train Mahanagar Godhuli leaving at 2 PM for Dhaka.

The third and shortest package takes you to Bandarban via the S. Alam non-a/c coach, and includes the trip to Chimbuk and Shailapropat, along with sight-seeing at the Meghla.

There are also two short Chimbuk tour deals for Chittagong residents, which take you to Chimbuk, with a stopover at Shailapropat. You have the option of either going by bus, or by reserved transport.

The contact address for the tour packages for Dhaka residents is:

**Darpan Complex (1st Floor) Gulshan-2
Tour Desk, Dhaka Sheraton Hotel Lobby
E-mail: theguide@bangla.net
Website: www.guidetours.com**

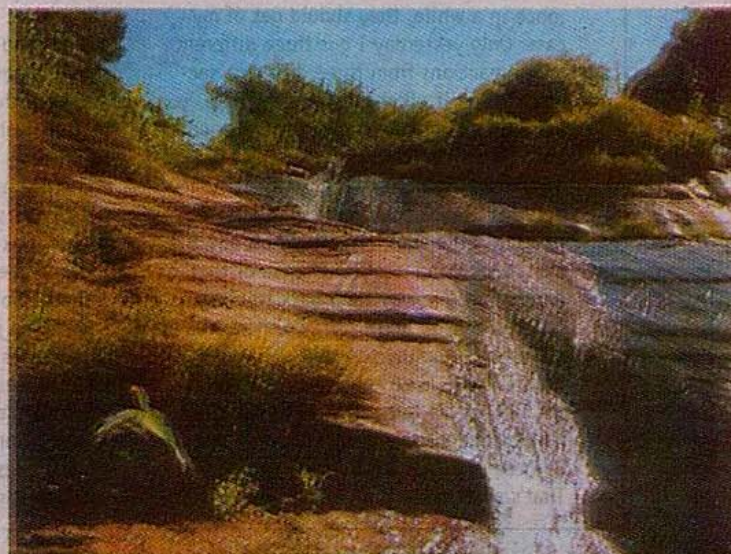
For Chittagong residents, the contact address for the

Chimbuk tours is

**New Railway Station, Chittagong (1st floor)
E-mail: theguide@bangla.net
Website: www.guidetours.com**

MANGO AND MORE

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) has the right package for this time of the year, with a 'Mango Orientation tour'. Seasonal fruits are always an added attraction to the vacation, and this tour takes one to the heart of the mango sector in Bangladesh, Rajshahi. This package is for three days and two nights and doesn't just comprise of visiting mango bazaars. It includes visits to archaeological sites in North Bengal, with places such as the historical Choto Sonamosjid at Chapainabaganj and the 3 century BC archaeological site in Bogura, added with visits to the Barendra research museum in Rajshahi and the local silk factory. The tour also takes one to the famous Kansat Mango wholesale bazaar, one of



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the largest markets for mangoes in Bangladesh. Enjoying mangoes to one's hearts desire is an added advantage. Although the heat may be one of the reasons to back off, the transport is air-conditioned and the package includes all meals and accommodation at twin sharing basis. The cost of the package is Tk.3750. Enrollment for the package starts right away and it is scheduled to start on the



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21st of July, so rush to the BPC located in Bijoy Sarani. Tel: 9120392.

SIGHTS WITH A SPLASH

Apart from the regular tours available around the year, the BPC also has a day tour, which is more or less a river tour. It is a full day river cruise, on a paddled steamer or a luxury vessel. This package can serve as an entertaining day out for the family if one is short on time. The tour starts with a journey to Mary Anderson at Narayanganj (Pagla), with the boarding of a ship there. The ship sets on its journey to Chandpur and the tour is a nice way of getting acquainted with the beautiful waterways of Bangladesh. With scenic natural beauty and a journey that spans the Buriganga, Dhaleshari, Padma and Meghna rivers, the day-out promises to bring the family together. There are cabin options for passengers, as well as cultural programmes on board and raffle draws. The ship also stops at Chandpur for half an hour and this shall give the passengers options for buying fish at the local fish market. The package includes lunch and snacks, and is priced at Tk.900, with extra charges for cabins.

GREENER PASTURES

For the more adventurous traveller, Bangladesh Ecotours provides quite a few options in Eco-tourism. With package tours spanning locations all over the country, this Chittagong based company definitely brings eco-tourism into the spotlight. The Hill-tract and Tribal Tour is one to look out

islands, beaches and more.

The Beach and Offshore Island Tour is also one in which Bangladesh Eco-tours excels in. The package includes visits to the wonderful Maheshkhali and Sonadia islands, as well as a tour to Saint Martins Island. The tour comprises of offshore cruises, swimming, sunbathing, seashell & handicraft hunting, beach combing, sightseeing and photography or helping with sea turtle conservation, green coconut drinking, pony-back riding, and a host of other varied pastimes.

For further information and details on more packages contact Bangladesh Eco-tours. Tel. 018-318345; 0171-264827; 031-637657 or visit their webpage at www.bangladeshecotours.com

JOURNEY TO JAMUNA

Now all this planning, packing, reservation and nitty gritty of travelling can bog a few of us down. So another way to unwind, particularly for these lazy few, would be to simply go to the nearest petrol pump, fill up the tank and head towards Jamuna, the mighty river of Bangladesh. After the bridge, this place has attracted a lot of city folks who are desperate to take some time out but at the same time not willing to venture far from their work either. So staying the night at resorts literally on the banks of Jamuna is a refreshing option.

Jamuna Resort Limited maintains and operates a huge very well secured housing complex. It accommodates conferences, meetings, weekend retreats and even picnics. In the complex they have facilities like swimming pool, two tennis courts, squash courts, basket ball yard, huge fields for children. For prior reservation dial 9133680-2 ext.50, 0171816807, e-mail jrl@bol-online.com.

Located in the heart of Elega town in Tangail, just 10km away from the Jamuna river, is Elega Resort Limited. It is hardly 100km from Dhaka and a 90-minute drive from Zia International airport. The resort has a total land area of 8.5 acres covered with lush green grass, uncountable plants and various trees of seasonal fruits, colourful tropical flowers and other flora. It's a nice place to be: lovely cottages, well-maintained gardens, not bad food. However there could be a few mismanagement hiccups, so make sure your reservation is confirmed and you have the rooms or cottages booked, otherwise the cordial front desk people would ask you to leave to accommodate others. Prior to taking the trip just dial 9870861, 8813242, 9872989. You can also check out their website www.ipssgroup.com.

Both the facilities are highly recommended for their picturesque landscape.



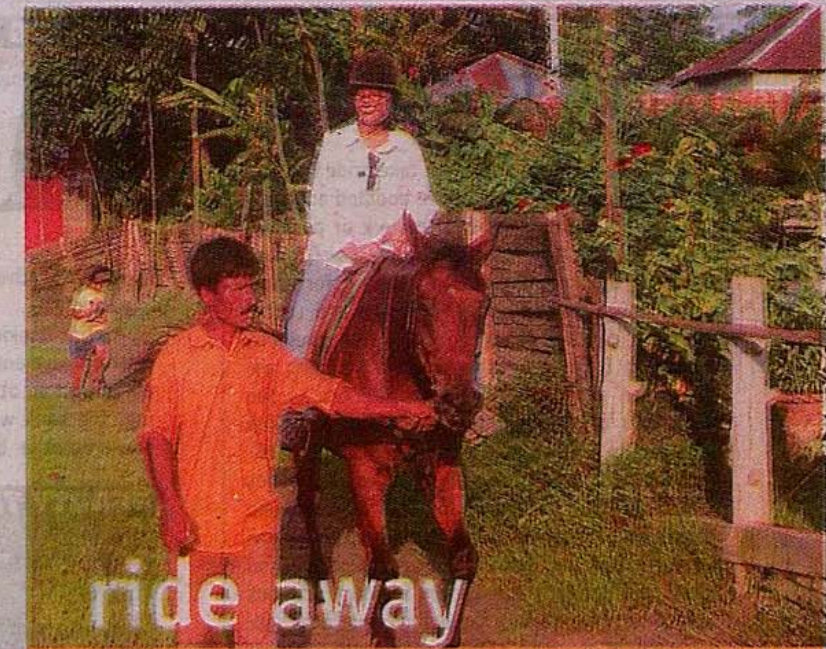
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for, but is a bit hard on the wallet. The tour comprises of a visit to the far south-eastern corner of Bangladesh, bordering Myanmar (Burma) the Chittagong Hill-tracts. These areas are home to over a half a million indigenous peoples of 14 unique tribes. Much of the traditional lifestyle is still preserved - tribal kings, village headmen and a self-sustaining, natural lifestyle. This region has only recently become accessible, with the signing of an internationally acclaimed accord between the indigenous people and the government. The tour promises to be a memorable experience for the adventure lover. It includes interactions with indigenous cultures, village-based conservation and education projects, tribal crafts, music and dance, festivals, Buddhist and Hindu temples, pristine

For those interested in buying Tangail taat on their way back, check out the big taat market in Aadalat para, Tangail but do not make the mistake of going there Friday afternoon. The city sleeps and literally your car honking in the narrow lanes would wake them up. Nevertheless if you are adamant to buy those elegant deshi weaves make sure you start early Friday morning and take a peak at Bazidpur Taater haat.

With so many options to choose from, all you need to do is pack your bags and arm yourself with sunblock and loads of film. Here's wishing you a holiday you won't forget!

By Mishel Alfi Khan, Sabrina F Ahmad and Raffat Binte Rashid



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ride away

WITH the holiday season stretching lazily ahead of us, one is hard pressed to find ways of passing the time in a fruitful or enjoyable way. Unfortunately, Dhaka isn't exactly overflowing with places to go, and nor does it really leave us with too many options of things to do.

Which is why, leaving the hulkabalo of the capital city and heading westward for a breath of fresh air isn't such a bad idea. Along with that fresh air, if you can spend a pleasurable afternoon riding horses, what can be better?

Trotover Riding Club and School, the first ever of its kind in Bangladesh, is located in Tongi, exactly 10 miles from Baridhara. It offers rides and riding lessons for horse lovers, be they absolute beginners or skilled experts.

Trotover presently has three horses, brought over from Calcutta, whose climate is similar to ours. There are plans for getting more horses sometime this winter. The club offers the option of a 45-minute supervised ride/lesson for Tk.500 or a ride on a hack for Tk.800, from 7-9am and 5-7pm between March and October, and 8-10am to 3-5pm between November and February, the lessons/rides are open throughout the year, but prior booking is recommended.

While we were over at Trotover, the owner, Sobera Ahmed Rizvi, graciously allowed us to explore the surrounding area, and showed us her little retreat, a beautiful cabin overlooking the riding school. The earthy brick building, with its open porch and large windows looks like something out of a Mills and Boon novel. What gives the place a homely log-cabin look are the palm-wood window and door frames and the whitewashed ceiling with its alternate palm-wood bars. Two bedrooms with attached bathrooms, an additional guest bathroom with shower facilities, a neat little kitchen, a compact dining room, an airy living room and a more formal drawing room complete this pretty picture, which is a work of artistry that would make any interior designer turn green with envy.

The clip-clop of horses' hooves, the wind in your hair, and the sight of a picture-perfect dream house... what more could you want? If you want to just get away for a day, make Trotover your destination.

For booking and more information, contact:
Sobera Ahmed Rizvi
Trotover Riding Club and School
Tel: 8811726
Mobile: 0171-526469, 0171-696928
By Sabrina F Ahmad



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