

Star Holiday

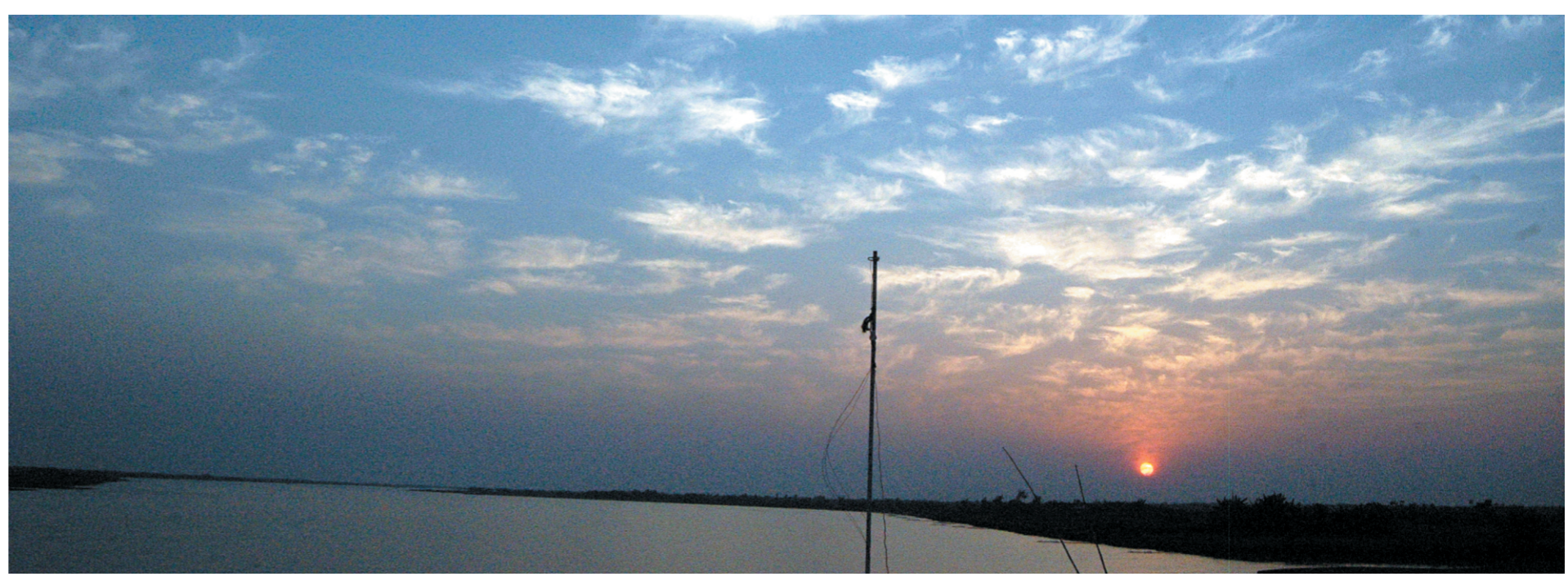


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DHAKA SUNDAY JUNE 12, 2005



LOCATION > NIJHUM DWIP CATEGORY > ADVENTURE

Sally for island

fact sheet

Distance: Appx. 240 km
Journey time: One and Half Days

NIJHUM DWIP

DHAKA

BAY OF BENGAL

HOW TO GO, WHERE TO STAY

Nijhum Dwip is an offshore island in the Bay of Bengal situated in the extreme south of Hatia island which is separated by Hatia channel. There are several approaches to the island. Passenger launches everyday plies between Sadarghat in Dhaka to Tomorrowddy Ghat of Hatia upazilla. Adventure tourists can hire a trawler from Tomorrowddy to Nijhum Dwip. A trawler may cost between Tk 1,200 and Tk 1,500 per day. Another approach is from Chittagong. A coastal passenger vessel plies between Chittagong and Nalchira Ghat twice a week. Our Star Holiday team took the sea-truck ride from Char Jabber Ghat to Nalchira Ghat at the northern tip of Hatia which took around two and a half hours. For overnight stay in the island you have to contact the UNO of Hatia in advance for booking the bungalow on the island, or you can contact the DFO of Noakhali to stay at Nijhum Dwip forest office. You must carry your food and other necessities.

Trip costs.
The trip may cost Tk 2,500 and Tk 4,000 per person.

THINGSTOCARRY

Life jacket Light-soled shoe Shorts, T-shirt Sunscreen lotion Sun hat
A pair of binocular Camera Flash light Sleeping gear Insect repellent, Best time to travel Winter



Part-1

THE sea-truck was a disappointment. It's a small affair; dirty all over, the sides rusted by the salt of the seawaters.

When we reached Maizdi Court port in the afternoon, the sea-truck was sitting there like the ugly duckling. The deck was already filled with *lungi*-clad men, *burkha*-draped women and children sat on wooden folding chairs, some munching peanuts, some having bananas and throwing away the peels carelessly into the air. Of course, what goes up must come down and so the floor of the deck was soon getting covered with the banana peels and peanut shells and becoming dirtier by the moment. A few mullahs all decked up in robes and *topi* lie sluggishly and read the cine page of a newspaper.

Under the deck is another cramped chamber with small round watertight windows. The beams of a few dim bare lights powered by direct current fail to make visible, the long wooden benches and tables. Under them, darkness gathers with only a tinge or two of the dim light thrown on them as the truck sways. The faces of the people shining as drops of perspiration poured down were sitting droopily making the case clear how pleasant it could be travelling boxed-up down there.

We were left with no option but to approach the Master and got immediate results. An exchange of Tk 400 got the four of us cramped his cabin of six feet by four feet. At least we have a place to keep our bags and camera and equipment that went along with it. But we needed a place to rest our bottoms and climbed another flight of stairs leading to the roof of the cabin. We were well all now set, the afternoon sun had no glare in it, just a pleasant light to bask in. We sat there and watched the on-goings around us. The Khalasis (ship crew) kept busy doing things and we hardly understood why they needed to be done. There were more mouths booming than hands moving though. But something must have been accomplished through the process, because how then could the sea-truck finally sally.

Like a woofer, the engine roared and gusts of black diesel-rich smoke came out of the exhaust pipe right beside us. The truck backed up, then shot forward, backed up and shot forward and again backed up and finally straightened to wade through the narrow river, taking a slow curve as if doing the tango.

Soon, we were passing by the infamous Fatrar Jungle, if the name stirs up some memories. Sometime last year, this forest was abuzz with mobs lynching robbers, if I can remember correctly, over 40 robbers were combed out of the forest and beaten to death.

The forest looks very strange, it is not a forest in the real sense; rather dry looking thickets and long reeds give it an almost inaccessible look. Someone hiding here can be completely invisible and that is what the robbers did. From here they operated, pounding upon fishermen, plundering their catch, throwing them into this very river with stomachs slit open. Cold

shivers ran down my spine while my body swell in goosebumps, just at the thought of it!

Slowly, the sea-truck took a bend and the forest disappeared. Now we were sailing through the open country. A glowing softness spreads over an amazing plain land. It is so green and smooth that you feel you are looking over a golf course. For miles you see nothing but the green fields and then a solitary hut. Children in tattered dresses were playing by the river. By now, the sun had glided close to the horizon and hung there like a big round ball of lava, spreading its yellow reflections on the water.

By now, the breeze was blowing cold. We could taste that particular salty smell of the sea in the air. The sea-truck is about to hit the Bay. We climbed down to the Master's cabin, huddled up on the 3 feet by 5 feet bed and dozed off. We awoke around 10 in the night to the noise of shouting and hollow sounds of people running on the deck. I looked out the window and found the sea-truck anchoring. We have arrived at Hatia.

At the terminal we got into a Baby Taxi, those two-stroke things we miss in Dhaka. We are at Jahazmara end, we will have to travel to the southern most tip of the island to put up at the forest bungalow. The night is dark and cozy. The soft breeze beating against our skins gave the feeling of a warm welcome. So, we hoped for a pleasant journey.

"Don't stop on the way," said Quashem, the forest ranger who accompanied us all the way from Maizdi Court, to douse some dark thoughts over our hope. "The robbers infest the area. Just keep on going. And one more thing -- don't mind the road."

Well, we did not understand the tongue he spoke. But we did right through our bones later on.

The Baby Taxi started off with the smell of petrol mixed with lube oil. The first few hundred yards passed by trouble free, and then we yelled out with big jolt. And then we yelled again and again and then continuously for the next two-and-a-half hours.

I have travelled many a bad road in my life, but not a single of

them was as bad as this. Well, I was fuming and could have killed anyone that night had they dared to call it a 'road'. The distance is only 30km and we could hardly travel at 10 km an hour! Our photographer Zakir simply sapped and looked dead. He even did not have the energy left to yelp at every jerk and jolt. So he left his future to fate and sat sulky, silent.

We wondered why on earth we couldn't stop on the way. If the robbers want to catch us, they can very well do it just by walking up to us with ease, as the 'Baby' was pattering through the night at snails pace. So, we decided to stop every ten minutes, stretch ourselves and massage our own poor backs and legs.

Finally the ordeal ended when we reached the forest bungalow. There was little left in us, so we wolfed down the food and went to deep slumber.

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Story: INAM AHMED
Photo: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

