

DHAKA SUNDAY MAY 20, 2007



HOLIDAY



INANI

Swash of the sea

I have crossed Inani several times before and stopped for a short break. Its breathtaking beauty always charmed me and yet I never had a chance to spend a whole day and a whole night at this beautiful spot in Cox's Bazar. So when we planned to visit Teknaj one more time, we contacted the forest department and made sure their bungalow, in fact the only one in Inani, was available for our night stay.

Very early in the morning, our car rolled into the bungalow yard. We were all hungry and tired from the nightlong journey. But just as luck would have it, there was apparently some miscommunication with the caretaker, he just gave us a blank look and said no rooms were available. We wanted to sound marooned, then pleading and then angry, and finally the caretaker unlocked two rooms, which looked perfectly alright for stay. The wide balcony overlooking the cool, green sea through the frills of pines and shals took our tiredness away. We were out onto the beach in 15 minutes.

Inani is unlike Cox's Bazar main beach in every aspect. The waves are calmer and the water much cleaner. And this is a coral beach. We walked across the sand dunes and found ourselves left to the lonely vastness. Because it is far away from Cox's Bazar main, very few people come here this early. We crossed a waist-deep pool of water -- to us it was a lagoon. The water got trapped as the high tide receded in ebb. To us, it was a huge natural swimming pool. We could swim in it. And yet we could lie on the edge, half-submerged in water just as we do on the beach. And the water was salty. What a fun! A swimming pool with saltywater!

But the real sea was more welcoming and we plodded through the sand towards the green waves breaking on the shore. The water was cool but we did not mind it. We dipped in the water until we shivered in the cold. Then we lay on the beach, basking the warmth of the sun and lazily watching the hills on the other side. This is another interesting feature of the place, you can find the sea and the hills together. The wind blew strong and the roar of the waves mingled with the rustle of the pines. On such a lonely beach nothing matters, one can shut out the outside world and get lost in ecstasy.

When we were warmed up, we again jumped into the sea.

Tired of the frolicking, we wanted to explore around. The black coral masses peeking over the water were our next target. We climbed on the corals and walked along, but soon learnt the folly of it. The coral surfaces were too rough and almost bruised our soles. And they are difficult to walk on. We slipped quite a few times and got badly bruised. Then we gave up. Instead we wanted to act field biologists.

There were some scattered corals half sunk in the sands close to the sea. Small pools of water gathered around them. We probed in the water, peeping under the coral formations, into the crevices. And then we found them. The large greenish crabs. They moved slowly across the sandy bottom, their eyes revolving like radars in different directions. One, two, three, many of them. Big, medium and small. I dipped my finger and they tried to grab it with their long pincers. I lowered a twig and two of them clutched it until I lifted them clean out of water. Then we found a hermit crab. The hermit crabs are a funny creature and very crafty too. They

always carry an empty mussel shell as a safe shield. This hermit crab was holding a large shell above its head like a helmet and was crawling fast. As we approached it, it withdrew itself completely inside the shell. From outside, one would think it a shell of a dead mussel. We lifted the shell and saw the crab's pincers. We dragged the thing out by its pincers. Dispossessed of its shield, the crab looked bewildered and lost. We put it down beside its shell and the creature sprinted inside its safe home again. We found some small fish swimming blissfully in the pool. And we found some live coral clusters, red and soft to the touch.

A group of fishermen beached their boat -- the first of the day -- and were hauling down the fishing net. We gathered there. These are the small boats, they don't wander far off into the sea and so their catch is small fishes and not much in quantity. There were some strange fishes leaflike and mud coloured. Their eyes were on one side. Kutta Jiva -- dog's tongue -- that is what the fishermen call them. They sorted the strange fishes and green crabs and threw them on the hot sand. The fish squirmed in pain and the upturned crabs slowly stretched and closed their feet. We felt bad and tried to rescue them by putting them into the small pools. As soon as they were released there, the crabs dug into the sand and the fish beat their strange bodies to cover themselves up in mud.

It was already noon and the beach was now crowding up with visitors who came by rented four-wheelers. The beach was sizzling with the blast from the sun. So we retreated to our guesthouse.

In the afternoon soft glow, we ventured out again. By now the beach had again become lonely. Only the whish of the breeze and the continuous roar of the breaking waves. Along

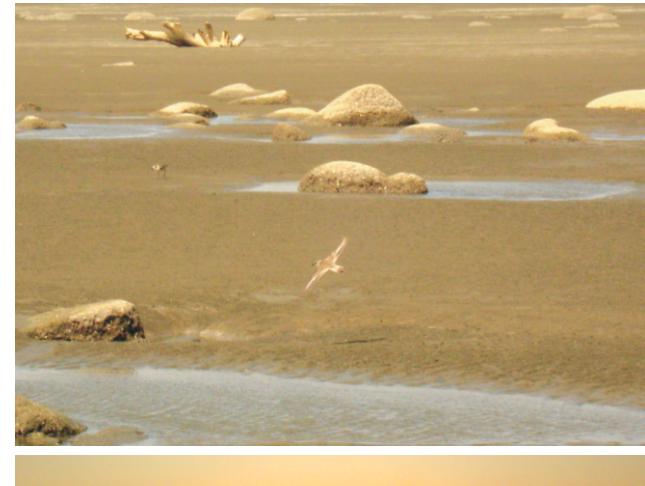


Swimming crab

Mud crab



Wonder of Coral



the coast ran a wisp of white foam. We walked along the lonely beach. The fishing boats were bobbing up and down away in the sea -- visible this moment, gone the next second. We met two visitors now -- a pair of huge gulls running into shallow waves and pecking food. They cawed as we approached them, but then decided to disregard our presence. We walked along for another mile until the sun immersed into the distant sea like a huge fireball.

The night enwrapped us with a strange quietness -- a quietness that was made even more overbearing with the distant swash of the sea. We stepped out of the bungalow to witness a brilliant display of zillions of stars. Against the ink black sky, they looked like thousand searchlights. They reflected on the placid lagoons. In the pale starlight we walked to the beach. There were Ursa Major and Ursa Minor -- the bears -- and Orion -- the warrior. Pegasus shimmering beside Andromeda. All splayed across the sky in celestial wonders.

We walked forward a few hundred yards and made out some strange black shapes stretching out, as it seemed, miles into the sea. A little closer and the shapes turned into huge coral formations -- hundreds and hundreds of them. They have emerged from the sea in low tide.

We watched a star shooting down into the sea -- a bright wisp of light fizzling out as abruptly as it started. Then two more shooting stars showered down. We stood there watching the phosphorus in the waves burning against the corals until we shivered in the cold.

Story: Inam Ahmed
Photo: Syed Zakir Hossain & Tawfiq Elahi
Courtesy: Forest Department

