

# Star **W** H O L I D A Y

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**BANGLADESH**



## Frosty forest

**W**E were virtually wading through the mist. It hung around like a shroud. On this early winter morning in the Rema Kalinga forest, only the tree trunks were visible -- dark and silent, looking like some mysterious spirits. My thoughts veered to death -- that mysterious, blissful, eternal affair. How some of us yearn for it, how we lovingly touch its hand. If death is like this winter forest morning then we can sail on it.

Now we could hear birds waking up, breaking the muted silence -- voices we could barely recognize. Then we heard the red jungle fowls crowing. Yesterday evening we also heard their voices, we were again hearing them today. A fowl was cooing somewhere very near. We left the trail and softly stepped into the forest. It was easy to walk without making a noise because the fallen leaves were now dew-sodden. Visibility was low because of the dense undergrowth. The fowl was now very near. We squinted our eyes and slowed down. Then we saw it -- a bright blob of red, golden and deep green. The bird saw us at the same instant and flapped its wings like pistons. It took it a few seconds to rise above the bush and vanish away.

We pushed deeper into the forest and meandered round the thick bushes. Woodspiders had woven huge early morning cobwebs. The big spiders were sprawled in the middle and several times we got entangled in the webs.

The forest was getting more and more mysterious with every moment. Huge trees had spread out to the sky. They were mysteriously crooked, looking like some witches whose innards had been spilled out, their long fingers had twined other trees, their every inch had its own interesting angles. We imagined we were going

through a cursed forest and the trees were all spirits looking down on us. Any moment, one of us would be their prisoner.

We had to cross several canals. Thrice we waded through knee-deep icy water. Next time we found a natural bridge in the form of a fallen tree.

And now we stopped in wonders. We had reached a clear space in the middle of the forest with undergrowth so green and thick that it gave the look of an African rainforest. The sun was already up and the sunlight shone on this place through the thick foliage of the tall trees. The rays came down in myriad shafts and lit up the dew drops gathered on the bushes. A trillion diamonds in their glory. The whole scene looked like a painting from the middle age era of divinity and heaven.

It was already two hours since we left the bungalow and the dawn chill was gone. We climbed another hill and then crossed another canal. We again stopped at a beautiful scene. There was this huge field with lump like bushes all over. Beautiful white flowers were in bloom. An appallingly beautiful scene! We sauntered into the field and stopped in surprise. These were no flowers but cobwebs. The funny looking spiders were too clever to imitate flowers to lure insects.

Thousands of creepy spiders.

We crossed this amazing place and hit a forest trail. On our left was deep gorge filled with long trees. We walked to the chirpings of thousands of birds. Only the lorikeets could be identified for their sharp shrieks. Then we saw a brilliant red bird, the size of a big sparrow, so red that your eyes get dazzled. A scarlet minivet. But where was its partner? That should be brilliantly yellow. But that was not to be found here.

And then while standing there we had the most wonderful discovery. We noticed a large animal on a branch with a long fluffy tail. It was looking at us with a keen look. It looked like a squirrel but too large to be one. We had not seen anything like it before. As we were taking its picture, the animal leaped up and ran along the thick branch. Yes, it was a squirrel -- a flying squirrel that are found in this forest. We were watching this wonderful animal rarely found in Bangladesh. The squirrel jumped from one branch and with a smooth plane like motion vanished into the forest.

We sighed to have lost sight of this beautiful mammal and started our trip back. It would still take us two hours to get back to the bungalow.

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Photo: TOWEIK ELAHI



As we walked through the somber forest, dewdrops splattered heavily on the sodden leaves on the ground, almost in a rhythm. Sometimes they splintered before hitting the ground and we knew it -- we could hear the drops crashing onto branches and leaves and then falling in fine droplets, we could hear them and see them -- the fine diamonds coming down in a slow motion.

