

Star WOLIDAY

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PACKAGE TOURS



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BANGLADESH



A lonely journey

MORNING came to Naljhuri as softly as the night had fallen. We woke up to a lazy, wet morning. It was still raining. One problem with the monsoon mornings is that you cannot figure out what time it is. It could be 6 in the morning or 12 noon. But it would look the same yawning hour. As if time had stopped.

The clouds were painting

pictures using the hills as canvas. They made different shapes. Very close to the bottom of the big hill, little cotton balls developed and slowly floated up to form a long dragon. It approached a deer with a big open mouth and devoured it. Then the dragon reached up to disappear into a thick black layer of cloud. Suddenly the scenes were

wiped out from our view like magic as a huge cloud engulfed us. Around us was nothing but a milky white layer. We could not see the trees on the lawn, the hills, the lake in the distant. Nothing. It was as if we were drowning in fog.

We could have spent the whole morning watching this esoteric play of the clouds and rain. But then the caretaker

said our breakfast was ready and we better started early.

Through the rain our journey began again. It was marshland once again. Beautiful rivers coming down the hills have crossed the landscape. We stopped over a bridge and watch a river flow by, placid and tranquil. Not more than 30 feet wide.

We reached Goainghat river bank after about one and a half hours, hired a boat and set off down the eddies. It would take us two hours to reach Ratargul, the swamp forest we were going to visit. We had heard a lot about this amazing forest and we had planned several times to visit it. But something always came between our plan and its execution.

On our back was an amazing scene. The Jainta hills looked overbearing and bluish. Silvery waterfalls were cascading down the side of the hills like snakes. We were on plain land and there were the hills and the waterfalls. The whole thing looked so unreal. It looked even more unreal on our way back from Ratargul. The hills appeared bigger and bigger, becoming as huge as if falling on us in the end, and the waterfalls faded in through

clouds and fogs.

But now, we were going through a ranching country. On both sides of the river roamed herds of cows, buffalos and sheep. Their healthy bodies showed how good these riverbanks were as grazing grounds. Nothing grows here, no grains, no vegetables, no nothing. Only long reeds and grass. The cattle gazed us with their round curious eyes.

This was a lonely place. Strangely lonely for a country of 150 million. You hardly meet a boatman or a fisherman. The few fishermen using nets looked disinterested in their acts. As if they were doing it for the sake of doing something. Even birds were scarce. We saw a few kingfishers and herons. The usual Shaliks were everywhere though. In a place like this loneliness becomes crueler.

As our boat crossed the bend in the river, we saw the forest. The red leaves of Barun trees greeted us to Ratargul. Welcome to Ratargul forest -- one of the rarest unexplored places in Bangladesh.

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