

# Star WOLIDAY



**Bombay --- Goa 6 Days**  
**BDT 50,000/- Only**

Win Bollywood Cinema Ticket

Air-Ticket  
 Hotel, Breakfast, Transfer  
 Sight-seeing

Call **01711425221**

**Galaxy Holidays**  
 quality service & fun!

**DHAKA TUESDAY JANUARY 19, 2010**



## Naturally Narail

**W**E were supposed to visit Narail months ago. But then many moons moaned by and all our plans collapsed one after another for one reason or another. Finally when we found time, it began with a disaster.

On a perfectly nice winter morning, we parked our car at the Mawa police station for two nights and went over to the speedboat terminal. On the other side of the Padma would wait a microbus. This arrangement would have been the quickest to Narail. With a heavy backpack and the jacket wrapped round my hand, I first stepped on the front deck of the speedboat. As I was about to step inside the canopy, two more halfwit fellow travellers with no knowledge of a speedboat's behaviour jumped in.

It took a second for the boat to rock vigorously, like a bucking horse; and the next second I found myself floating on the Padma. My backpack felt like a tonne of brick and impossible to dislodge. My jackets were fitted tightly. Somehow I swam against a current that was trying to carry me out to the middle. Then I found the white hull of the speedboat above my head. I grabbed its edge and calmed myself.

Then I was laughing manically. All those birdbrains responsible for the mayhem and my watery state were also in water. All with their backpacks and one of them swimming like a rat thrown into



the pond. There were people stretching out their hands to me and I caught a few of them, or they rather caught me and pulled. Try to climb onto a speedboat from the river and find out how difficult it is. Almost when I was thinking the rest of my life would be spent on the Padma bobbing like the float of a fishing rod, they landed me on the deck. The rest were rescued as well.

Drenched, we sat like some catfish and chattered teeth as the speedboat roared through the Padma for half an hour. I tried to see the best of the river view -- the seagulls dancing on the waves, the long sandy beaches and wonderful squirt of silts thrown up by dredgers looking like whales spraying water.

Thankfully, the chilly ride was over, but not our indignation. All the fools on the other side of the bank -- from village morons to newly-wed girls going to in-law's house -- asked if we fell over the speedboat. Our answers varied -- No, we were scuba-diving, only we forgot to change clothes; No, we were up in the sky too high and got drenched by the clouds; No, we are Argentinean pearl fishers.

Once on the other side, the journey transformed into one of bliss and wonderment. The road was wide and empty eerily empty for Bangladesh. For minutes we traveled before meeting another vehicle. The roadside view also changed dramatically. The fields spread away to the horizon and uncountable palm trees gave that special feature to the landscape. Then I realized all those tals we have in Dhaka must have come from here. Jute sticks were piled up

along the road in the most interesting fashion. The stacks looked like witches' hats.

In exactly four and a half hours from our journey in Dhaka we found a narrow side road and followed it to a beautiful river. The narrow river meandered very gracefully through bright yellow mustard fields. Not a ripple in it. Its marbled water looked almost blue. Only occasionally a jute-laden boat would appear lazily and sail away.

A few blackened figures stood knee-deep in the river and used buckets to throw water onto their saplings on the slanted paddy fields. We looked at the cotton-balling clouds above and inhaled the utterly village smell -- of water, mud, mustard and paddy -- and knew heaven is here.

There was a strange ferry here -- a private one inscribed "Arunima Modhumoti Ferry" on it. Its triangle shape made us to research out that it was in fact the sawed-off front of a steel boat, probably a cargo ship. A Chinese diesel engine has been fitted to its side in a watchtower like room.

It took us a few minutes to cross the ferry. Here we had to board a rickshaw-van. A ten-minute trip through a village took us to the resort Arunima Countryside. The tree-frilled wide road welcomed us inside the sprawling resort to a cosy bungalow.

It's a beautiful place full of tall trees and big ponds. There was a beel as well -- a water body so huge that the end part of it had been turned into a bird sanctuary. Amid thousands of red lotus were nesting the winter birds, mostly whistling teals, cormorants, egrets and herons.

On the bank of the beel is the dining place. We watched the birds

cackling and whistling and rising above the water and dropping again as we had our lunch.

I took a stroll around the resort. It has many promises. The whole place has been turned into a golf course as well. We were told that a team from Dhaka Club had recently come here to play. The landscaping has been outstanding at places. So close to the Dhaka city, it could be anybody's dream retreat. With conference rooms and all, a corporate attraction.

The bamboo rooms with ACs and all by the beel are interesting. Only their balconies are too narrow for any meaningful lazing.

There was this big field behind our bungalow and a high ground for the golf tee. We sat there in the afternoon and watched two horses grazing nearby. There was this lonely farmland beyond the field -- the paddy stalks looked dry and golden in the dying sun. A long stretch of tall trees lined round the field like a looming forest.

Suddenly the sun died down and a fine layer of mist settled in. A little girl in a red frock limped along the field. The sun was now hanging very low, looking like a pink fireball. The horses neighed. The cackling of the birds peaked as their nesting time neared.

We watched the whole Dalisuke transformation of nature and felt content.

Before evening we took a walk through the village. It was the most beautiful village I had ever come across. Bamboo huts with clean yards fenced off with hedges. The traditional bamboo pigeon pens hanging under the ceiling ledges. The calf with their mothers chewing the cud. The jute straws

burning in the mud oven. That old acrid smell.

You could hear the children's laughter and the silhouettes of the women cooking in the outhouse. The kerosene lamps and the burning firewood throwing a kind of wavering glow on the faces. The men were sitting in the yards, puffing on their hukkas. Their faces content with the smell of the hays stacked in the corner. The harvesting was just completed and it was a good year. The rain had lifted the crops in time and the pests were few.

Then I heard the unmistakable hoots. Our searching eyes found two owlets sitting in the gathering dusk on the electric line passing over the barren field. They were waiting for the field mice to come out.

We left them to their own affairs and walked to the Modhumati river. A half moon had cast a magic silver and flooded the river silver. We could see as far as the farthest bend. The river lay there prattling some mysterious songs to the universe.

We listened as a perfect night closed in.

It was time to come back. This time at Mawa we were extra cautious while getting on the speedboat. One after another we filed ourselves. No rush. Ah. All safe.

After about fifteen minutes we were in the middle of the Padma and something queer caught our eyes. Lots of speedboats were moored in the mid-river. What are they doing, we wondered. First I thought they were tourists enjoying the Padma cruise. But what interests should tourists find here? Then they must be some kind of geological surveyors looking for minerals. But then why so many women and children?

Just then our speedboat passed by one stationary boat. To our surprise we found that the outboard engine had been taken apart and the boatman was fiddling with it. Then we passed another boat and its engine was also dismounted. We passed another and another. And then we realized what had happened. The river was so shallow here that the boats were all stuck.

Hardly a second went by before our boat suddenly stopped with a sudden jerk and three of us just simply tumbled over into the river. The same three. I stood up sheepishly, all wet once again. But then I again started laughing maniacally.

Whoever has ever heard of the Padma flowing just ankle deep in midstream?

Story: INAM AHMED  
 Photo: MD NURUDDIN

**fact sheet**

**Direction: Narail**

**Contact:**  
 Tel : 02-9896945  
 Fax : 02-8829681  
 e-mail : info@shabaztourism.com

**Time distances of Arunima Countryside & Gold Resort from nearby cities:**  
 Dhaka : 4 hours  
 Jessore Airport : 1 hour 45 minutes  
 Khulna : 1 hour  
 Gopalganj : 20 minutes

