



SUNDARBANS

The allure of the Bengal tiger

We thought it was high time to go meet the Royal Bengal in its home, all together in a large group. Even if we did not see 'his majesty' himself, at least we would see some crocodiles and probably a deer or two. So we gathered in a number, keeping in mind the promise of moonlit nights ahead, and started off.

The moment all 27 of us boarded the 'Sundarban Express' headed to Khulna, it became apparent that the journey would be a success regardless of meeting any of our 'untamed' friends in the jungle. Continuous chatter of friends, joking about, and a stream of fun companionship as well as snacks and taking photos were already making the trip a memorable one.

We reached Khulna in the evening and our little ship to the Sundarbans departed from the jetty nearby, and we were off, with us as the only group of passengers. This would be home for the next four days.

It was hard to imagine this while floating in the waters of the Rupsha river. The moonlit night further encouraged us, and we all gathered on the ship's open deck, and bathed in the silver beams; we laughed and sang together all evening, and it was dinner time already.

The food was delicious, although a little on the spicier side. Most food of the river people are generally spicy.

The cabins on the ships had bunk beds, one over the other delighting the children in the group. There is quite a variety in the size of the ships that go to the Sundarbans, with capacities ranging between 150 people to as few as 25-30 people. The living conditions are mostly the same, but the facilities and comfort provided can

affect the prices. Generally it costs between Tk10,000 to Tk35,000 per head.

The symphony of moving waters lapping against the ship's metal body as well as the happy chirping of excited people woke me up early in the morning. I wondered how everybody had started chatting away so early again.

The ship was moving forward through the morning mist, which masked the light of the sun. Everyone was already up, although with dozy eyes and a steaming cup of tea in their hands.

Our guide was already rushing us, as there were two smaller boats tied behind the ship, to take us further inside the forests, through much smaller and intimate canals. And what amazing views! The boats flowed on peacefully, with so many of us stuffed on them, in complete and utter silence, except for the chirping of birds here and there.

The trees on the banks stood in unison, as if locked in a familial embrace. No one spoke, because that would mar the pristine silence, and overpower the songs of the birds.

After about an hour, a silent yet invigorated group of people came back to the ship after viewing the sunrise over the waters.

Next came breakfast, and a period of general laziness. Then came lunch, and we all shivered and freshened up, and the very relaxing "bhat ghoom" on the ship's open deck. This little nap, so common in our childhoods, has all but become an unattainable luxury since we all entered working lives. It was after a long time that we all napped,

