

| SPOTLIGHT |

| SPOTLIGHT |

surely a spectacular bonanza for the city dwellers who want to flee to the natural splendour.

After crossing the Birulia bridge, one would not require landmarks or a Google map to know whether you have reached your destination or not. The rose fields on both sides hint that you are at the right place.

"Around 90 percent farmers here belong to a dedicated community of master gardeners who treat their rose plants with such love and care as if they were their children," says Amir Chan, a rose farmer in Mostapara.

Remember the night before New Year's or any national celebration, when you spend three to four times the usual price on roses? The scenario here is quite opposite. You get to see roses everywhere, not only in the gardens. On the murky swamp underneath the plants, on the earthy narrow streets of these villages, in front of shops in the bazaar- we came across roses everywhere, strewn around casually. Some of them are so big that you can cup the blossoms in your palm and they will fit them just fine, while some are rather straggly, half-wilted.

As the local people phrase it, "We live and breathe roses."

The village Sadullahpur can be reached via a boat ride on Turag River in just 30 minutes from Diabari Ghat. It produces most of the roses in the union, gaining the title of "Golap Graam" or the village of roses. However, adjacent villages like Mostapara, Shyampur, Bagnibari, Kumarkhoda are also dependent on rose farming.

According to the Savar Agricultural Office, 250 hectares of lands are dedicated to flower farming, most of which are roses. Farmers grow medium length stems and each stem is laden with blooms. "There are also many fields where you will get to see the flower - Gladiolus. In fact, we started off flower farming with Gladiolus, but pests were abundant and these flowers are sensitive. They tend to wither and fall over easily on a windy day. So, we started farming roses," says Rahmat Ali, a flower farmer in Mostapara. "We also farm Miranda roses that are velvety red and incredibly ruffled. There are very few fields where you get to see roses of other kinds like Lincoln roses, Milan roses and white roses."

Farming roses can be nerve-racking at times; it's always a bit of a gamble on the farmers' part, spending long days in the fields. It is all manual labour, filled with uncertainty. Year-long sunshine and perfectly moisturised soil are necessary for a good crop of roses.

"There are days when we have to throw away all the flowers if there are no buyers," says Md Hazrat Ali, a local rose farmer. "You have to pluck fresh roses from the fields every day. If you are lazy and skip a day, you have to pay the price for the next days!" Roses have thorns too and the farmers here don't have any protection gear. "But all the pricking and scratching from thorns don't trouble us anymore!"

Despite many challenges, for the farmers, being in constant contact with such beautiful flowers matter the most.



"The joy of burying your nose in the first blooms of the garden is magical!" exclaims Ali.

The majority of the rose growers focus on limited varieties, growing them in massive quantities. In Bangladesh, months of December to February are actually the busiest months for rose sale, given the number of festivals- starting from Victory Day, New Year's Eve, International Mother Language Day to Valentine's Day, not to mention the wedding season. Over the last five or six years there has been an explosion of new seasonal flower farmers, who take up rose farming only during these three months.

We recommend that you spend the afternoon till evening in the rose farms. Because after 3 pm, the farmers start hand plucking flowers one by one at a



HOW TO GO TO BIRULIA FROM DHAKA

We recommend you take a boat ride from the Diabari Bottola Ghat near Mirpur, or from Mirpur Beribadh till Sadullahpur Ghat. This amazing ride through Turag River requires will take around 20 minutes.

If you prefer going by car, bus or any other public transport you can go across Birulia bridge till Akranbazaar. Once you are in Akraanbazaar, take a motor driven rickshaw till Mostapara, Sadullahpur or any other village that you want to go to. Happy touring!

fast yet careful pace, break the blooms and gently tie the roses in bunches while many visitors and local people stop to witness this amazing flower picking ritual.

While they are busy plucking and spraying, the farmers will answer any questions or concerns you may have. In fact, they might even offer you one or two roses for free!

After counting them carefully, the farmers carry the heavy bundles on their heads, and rush to the local wholesale markets that have developed in the last few years and have been incredibly supportive of the rose farms. Within a few minutes after the market is opened, farmers arrive and unload the baskets

and bundles to showcase the roses to the buyers all the way from Shahbagh, Farmgate, Banani and many other places in Dhaka.

"Establishment of these local bazaars have helped the farmers as the gap between the growers and the buyers is quickly closing. This is exciting for the small, remote flower farms in Birulia, as it means that they no longer have to carry them all the way to Dhaka. Having a local wholesale market here saves them time and money," says Md Sabibur Rahman Sabu, the owner of Mostapara flower market. Since establishment, these markets, along with many other markets in Birulia, Abul Kashem Market in Shyampur, have been a crucial part in

getting the farmers' products out to the masses in the simplest and most efficient way possible.

"From experience I can tell you that commercial rose cultivation is a profitable business," says Hazrat. "Each of the bundles carry 300 flowers, that we sell at 1000 takas. The price may vary depending on the season and number of buyers."

"Every day we do a trade of around Tk. 2 lakh in this market," adds Shabu.

For a romantic day trip or a weekend trip or maybe even a photography walk, you could visit Sadullahpur, Mostapara or any of these villages and expect a wonderful time! Make sure you don't intrude in the farmers' busy picking schedule and pay proper respect to the

privacy of all the people living in those areas.

And most importantly get a bundle from the farmers for your loved ones or for an occasion or better yet, for yourself!

You can't just hold a bunch of perfectly bloomed roses and not feel happier! ■

