



OUT IN THE LAND OF MANGROVE TREES

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There are some good things about this season, like the one week winter vacation which is all about rooftop BBQ parties with friends and cousins and maybe even a short trip to somewhere within the country. So, last week, my family decided to make use of the vacation by going on a family tour to the Sundarbans. Cousins, largest mangrove forest, and straight off the bucket list- what more could I ask for?

DAY 1

We set off in an AC bus on a warm Friday afternoon, wearing cardigans just in case winter arrived. The bus took us to Jaikhana Ghat in Khulna after a journey of around 9 hours. There, we met a guide from our ship MV Flamingo, who took us to a small boat which would take us across the Rupsha river to get on our ship. It was around 3 AM in the morning and to sit on that boat staring at the calm water of Rupsha under an almost full moon- was breathtaking.

We arrived on the ship to find a tiny room with a bunk bed reserved for us. I can't say the room was too convenient, considering the roof was almost touching my head but believe me when I tell you that it was absolutely worth it. Some of the bigger rooms had attached bathrooms but there were two very clean common toilets as well. Dining was downstairs and we had our dinner that morning at 4 AM with rice, deliciously cooked sea fish and *daal*. We went to bed tired that day, after paying a visit to the sundeck and being excited about the views that were waiting for us on the following days.

DAY 2

We woke up after a 3 hour sleep to know that we had reached Kotka. Kotka is located to the south of the Sundarbans. It's a good spot to see deer and for bird watching. We had boiled eggs and bananas for breakfast, got dressed and got off from the ship with our sunglasses and cameras to Kotka Wildlife Sanctuary. We walked through the forest along a wooden boardwalk, often stumbling upon broken pieces of wood. After an hour of walking, we saw

a herd of deer, making us gasp at the beauty of their spotted skin. A wild boar appeared now and then but they seemed to be used to having humans around.

For the remainder of the day we chilled out on the ship and enjoyed the calm, soothing view of the forest, admiring the sight of the mangrove trees that lined the river banks, keeping a sharp eye out for any wildlife. Of course we had to wear thick sweaters and beanies to cover ourselves - it really did feel like winter there. Barbecue arrived after dusk and it was finger-licking good. We played

time, and asked to keep our voices hushed the whole time so that we could listen to the birds chirping. I cannot explain in words how beautiful it was to see the morning birds flying and chirping loudly amidst a sort of silence that would make you fall for the jungle so much you'd never want to leave. We spotted monkeys, fish eagles, and boars. Getting off on a platform nearby, we walked up to a high tower from where we could view an entire part of the forest, admiring the mangrove roots jutting up from the forest floor, trees that looked like

forest, in case the Royal Bengal tiger decided to have us for lunch.

At night, we had large *golda* prawns cooked in coconut milk with white rice and *daal*. We played mini golf till the dead of night and arranged a few other games for everyone.

DAY 4

Last day of our trip and it began with the forest guard telling us stories about the national animal. We were then taken to Harbaria Ecotourism Centre, with the hope that we might spot the tiger himself. This was another long walk through the forest that lasted about an hour. We did not see tigers but there were footprints and to us, that was enough.

Later in the day, we went to Karamjol, one of the gateways to the majestic wildlife sanctuary of the Sundarbans. We feasted our eyes on a vast range of salt water crocodiles, alligators, wild boars, monkeys and lots of deer. The walk through Karamjol was beautiful - we stopped now and then to look at the tall trees surrounding us, appreciating the green and brown around us.

We returned back to Jaikhana Ghat that evening to start for Dhaka.

EXPENSES

Along with food, 4-days boarding on the ship and bus rides - each of us needed around BDT 9000 on the whole trip. You can bring down the costs to as much as BDT 5000 or less if you're going on a less luxurious ship, or a non AC bus to and from Dhaka. The food, the stay-in on the ship, the boat rides, the hour-long walks through the forest, the swamps and scaring off your little cousins yelling "*Baagh ashche!*" are worth every penny.

Whether you have visited every corner of the world or not, you're certainly going to have one of the best times of your life at the Sundarbans. It speaks to you in ways immeasurable, and the sea calls you like you have known it forever.

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carom and ludo till late at night.

I think one of the most heart warming experiences of this trip was the short naps I took on the sundeck, comfortably lying on its spacious lounge chairs while enjoying the fresh forest air.

DAY 3

We woke up at 5 AM to watch the sunrise. Our first activity of the day was an early morning rowboat trip through comparatively narrower river channels. We were accompanied by armed forest guards this

they had been painted, and the sound of silence.

In the later part of the day, we went to Kochikhali beach which is lapped by the Bay of Bengal. Here, the Baleshwar river and the sea converge to create a harmony that you are unlikely to see anywhere else. Kochikhali beach is full of dead trees felled by the cyclone Sidr in 2007; the water is warm yet cool enough to soothe your body and soul. The forest guard stood the whole time in front of a specific entrance to the