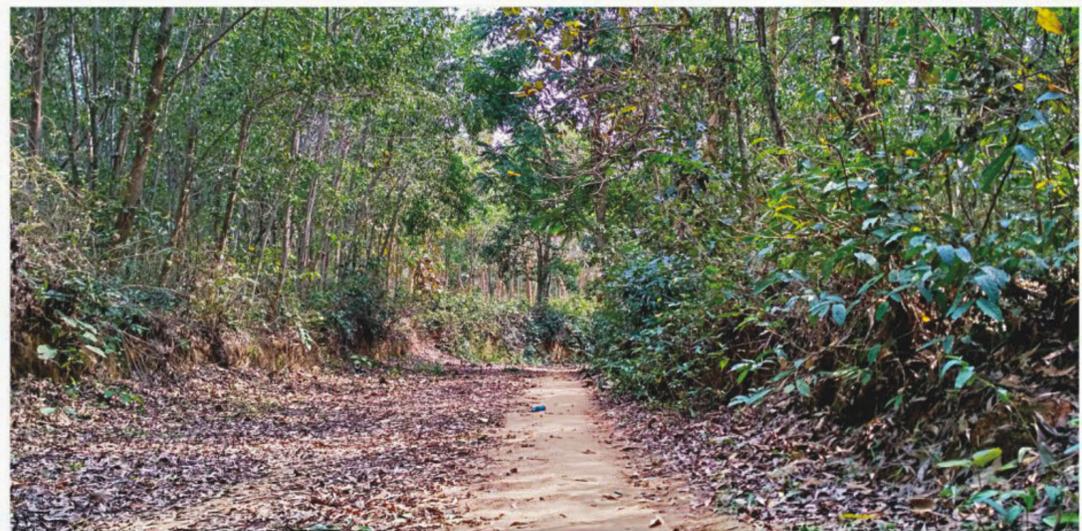


PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA



## UNEXPLORED WONDERS OF RANGAMATI

# KATTALI BEEL & PABLAKHALI FOREST

ISHTIAQ AHMED

Craving for a getaway from the city of construction dust and automobile smoke, I had been planning for a weekend retreat for quite some time in a place other than the most-frequented “tourist destinations” of the country. But it wasn’t easy to find a brand new place for a quiet relaxing short trip.

The Hill Tracts have some of the most vibrant and pristine landscapes of the country. Once enchanted by its captivating beauty of lush green mountains, ever-green forests, serpentine rivers and great lakes – one is sure to come back again and again to find solace. Nowadays many a young adventurous people have been frequenting the hills of Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachari for trekking and backpacking. This article is about a less-explored water-route that connects two of the three districts.

A tour of Rangamati is sure to include a boat trip in Kaptai Lake on an engine boat. Generally it's a short ride – mostly people go up to Shuvolong, a waterfall that remains dry most of the year. An up-down boat ride up to Shuvolong doesn't take more than three hours and in the process, a little portion of the immense Kaptai Lake is actually seen. The lake has a lot to offer to those who want to explore

it to the fullest, and they are rewarded generously.

Kattali Beel constitutes a substantial portion of the Kaptai Lake. It generally takes 3 hours to reach the beel on a boat starting from Rangamati town. The intro passage encapsulates the essence of the experience of getting into the depths of the water body.

This beel retains water almost throughout the year. The first segment of the journey to the beel up to Barakal Bazaar is the quintessential Kaptai Lake experience: a boat ride with many twists and turns on the gentle lake waters with lush green hills overlooking on both sides.

Then, the vast stretch of water of Kattali Beel shows itself. The trace of greenery is long gone and only a monochrome landscape exists. Water is everywhere as far as eyes can go, but on both sides, there are long stretches of grey mountain ranges on the horizon.

A small island comes to view out of nowhere. The mere existence of it was so delightful that one would start to wonder how wonderful a solitary island-village can be. We halted here for a hearty lunch and then carried on our journey. The little village is aptly named Kattali Bazaar.

Kattali Beel begins to end after crossing the bazaar and one with intentions of visiting only the beel can go back to

Rangamati in the same direction of coming, but we had plans to explore a bit further the next day. So we decided to spend the night at Langadu, an upazilla on the north-eastern end of the Kaptai Lake.

The next day, we started early as we had plans to visit the less-known Pablakhali Wildlife Sanctuary, the second largest reserve forest of Bangladesh, after the Sundarbans. It took us an hour and half to reach Amtali Bazaar, the entrance of Pablakhali from Langadu via the narrow stretches of Myinee River. The journey on both sides of the river was breathtaking, but the intrusion of tobacco cultivation in lands which for years had produced crops was disheartening.

We reached Pablakhali early and spent quite a few hours in the wilderness. It is a tropical evergreen forest with huge land area and diverse flora and fauna that ideally takes days at stretch to observe – but we had only a few hours to spare. We spent those walking around as much as we could.

After the forest trip, we came back to our engine boat which dropped us at a bazaar called Durchari, and that was the end of the two-day long relaxing boat trip, the best so far in our lives. Memories of some trips last a lifetime even if they are really short-lived, and this trip clearly was

something like that.

### PROBABLE ITINERARY

Day 0 (night): Dhaka – Rangamati (by bus, overnight)

Day 1: Rangamati – Kattali Beel – Langadu (by boat, 6-7 hours)

Day 2: Langadu – Amtali Bazaar (Pablakhali) – Durchari (by boat); Durchari – Baghaichari (by bike); Baghaichari – Dighinala – Khagrachari (by Chander Gari, 4WD); Khagrachari – Dhaka (by bus, overnight)

### GETTING REAL IDEAS

The selection of boat and haggling for price is critical in this boat trip. There are several ghaats in Rangamati town - Reserve Bazaar Ghaat being the largest one. Similarly, local launches operate in the Rangamati – Langadu route, but it's best to reserve a boat. You can do that from Reserve Bazaar Ghaat, although I'd suggest you reserve a boat from the Parjatan Ghaat. It will cost a bit more (4000-5000 BDT for a group of 6) but the boats are in visibly better condition and are registered against your name at the time of boarding – so safer as well.

*Ishtiaq Ahmed is a travel enthusiast who devours fictions, dreams of Paris and writes only when his brain parasites need a place to crash. Can be reached at [Ishtiaq\\_Ahmed\\_26@yahoo.com](mailto:Ishtiaq_Ahmed_26@yahoo.com)*