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Neelkowri Bajra: The exquisite past in Kaptai Lake

There was a time when the aristocrats of Bengal spent their time on bajras—the magnificent boats meant to be languished in on river waters. Typically, a bajra (the English called it budgerow) is a large boat with a cabin, deck and a large rooftop to sit and enjoy the river sights.

In the 17th century, British writer, merchant, and traveller Peter Mundy was astounded to see bajras on the Ganges. He described the boathouse in his book 'Itinerary of the World' as fanciful and extraordinary. The bajras of Bengal continued to be pleasure boats up until the mid 20th century.

Today it is back on the Kaptai Lake of Chittagong—christened Neelkowri.

Lake View Island, a resort run by Bangladesh Army, has revived the extinct glory. Now rowing on the houseboat, you can enjoy the peace and tranquility of nature day and night.



Architect of the bajra Ador Yusuf said initially the plan was to build a museum of extinct boats and a boat resort. However, the idea was narrowed down to a houseboat later.

"Kaptai is a lake with small islands surrounded by hills. So I thought to utilise the water body instead of land. From that a boat resort came to my mind."

He designed the 20 by 50 feet long boat resort in ways that attempts to mix the Sampan - a traditional boat of Chittagong - and bajra. In fact it has all the modern facilities that include two beds for six people, LED TV and washroom. Above the cabin there is an open roof on which mattresses are spread for the nature lovers.

With a heave and push against the



bank's soil, the boatman takes off the boat towards the deeper waters, away from the shore-- we set sail.

Where to stay

First time travellers to Kaptai will want to know two things — how to go to Kaptai and how much it might cost you to stay in the resort. Lake View Island is an affordable resort. It has two options -

AC cottage Karnaphuli (at Tk 4000 per night)

Non AC Cottage Raikhang (priced at Tk 2000 per night).

Renting the Neelkowri is slightly on the expensive side. A night on the heritage boat will cost about Tk 10,000, but earn you the experience of a lifetime.

By Ananta Yusuf

Photo courtesy: Kamol Das

মাদক ব্লুন নাম

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