



PHOTOS: MD MOAZZEM MOSTAKIM

Of canals and guavas

FATIUL HUQ SUJOY

It was early morning on a random overcast day in August, and our gang of seven sped through the green countryside near Barisal on a vehicle that's a mash-up of an "auto" and a "tempo". Our destination was the floating guava market of Bhimruli, Pirojpur. None of us have ever visited the place and have only seen its existence and praise in the travelogues of strangers online. We had our fears of the online posts exaggerating and us being disappointed eventually. But with a taste for venturing to new places and a holiday to utilise, we hopped through the underdeveloped roads towards the hidden lands of the guavas.

Before I jump into our experience, let me inform you about our destination. The floating market of Bhimruli is located on one of the many canals spread across the Atghar Kuriana union of Pirojpur. The canals are home to an array of plants and fruits, among which the guavas hold the majority. This is most evident if you visit during the monsoon, from late June till early September. Other than the unique floating market, the experience includes a voyage on a troller boat through the definitive marshlands of Southern Bangladesh. And I, personally, made the trip for the latter.

The actual segment of our little trip started after we were finally able to hire a troller boat. After bargaining with about a dozen different boatmen, we hired one which eventually cost us the same amount the very first boatman demanded. That, my friends, is a con of being a farmer murgi from the city.

Regardless, we were happy to finally be on a surface that had significantly fewer

cracks and holes than the one we had been on prior. But we also forgot about the constant vibration of the troller's engine which is a real buzzkill.

The next phase of the journey serves better as an experience than material for storytelling. It wasn't eventful. We cruised through the narrow canals that didn't have an abundance of diverse scenery. But what it had was enough to entrance us. The green was bright and everywhere, and engulfed in it we went through, in a poetic way, a spiritual cleansing. The general format of a trip includes an exhausting journey followed by reaching a goal



remarkable enough to make it worth the hard journey. Our trip didn't have much of a difficult journey nor a specific goal. The whole ordeal was a stretched out meditation session on a boat and it was truly refreshing, if not eventful.

We passed the floating market twice, once for photo shooting purposes, the next time for additional exploration. I have to be honest with you, it did not overwhelm me with awe and astonishment. Maybe it was because of my cynical nature or maybe it did not meet the expectations the overly filtered photos in the internet had set up. But it still was a

sight to behold, for its uniqueness and authenticity. Everything about it was genuine, from the loud haggles for guavas from boat to boat, to the noticeable enthusiasm with which the guava farmers unloaded the treasured fruits. Our presence there as tourists hardly went noticed, and that is unfortunately rare in this day and age of bloated up tourist spots.

The market is a great place to buy some authentic deshi guavas in the cheapest price possible. And it being a wholesale market, you can buy them as souvenirs for home. There's also a chance to eat freshly



picked guavas from the gardens. Not all gardens give tourists access and you shouldn't steal either. The gardens are typically submerged in water with a strip of muddy land in between. You'll have to traverse through the mud and dirt to get to the trees. If, like mine, your teeth aren't strong enough to enjoy the hard guavas, this whole ordeal may not be worth it for you. But I found it fun. I got a leech stuck on my toes there. I did not expect my first leech attack to be on an innocent floating market trip.

Our cruise ended on the three hour mark as decided with our boatman. I,

personally, was quite satisfied with our small journey. The cherished time at the unique floating market, the short lived adventure at the gardens and of course, the spiritual trip down the canals – a medley of memorable moments indeed.

I insist that you visit it too. This is equivalent of a day trip with comfy launch rides on both ends. It can also be an extension to the next time you visit Kuakata. Or it can be the highlight of a greater Southern Bangladesh trip as part of your great exploration of our beautiful and diverse country.

Itinerary:

If you live in Dhaka, the best plan is to take an overnight launch to Barisal. Double cabins cost around BDT 1800 and single ones BDT 1000. Decks cost BDT 100 per person. The launch will reach Barisal by 4 or 5 AM in the morning.

Take a tempo as early as possible from the launch terminal to "Chourasta". There you can hire an auto that fits 7-8 people, to take you to Atghar Kuriana through the Nabagram road. It will cost BDT 300-500.

Near the canals you'll find plenty of troller boats that easily fits a dozen people. The cost is based on the number of hours you'll spend and your bargaining skills. Ours cost BDT 900 for 3 hours.

On the way back you can visit the famous Guthia Mosque and Durgasagar. You'll have plenty of time to explore the Barisal town before boarding your launch back home.

Fatiul Huq Sujoy is a tired soul (mostly because of his frail body) who's patiently waiting for Hagrid to appear and tell him, "Ye're a saiyan, lord commander." Suggest him places to travel and food-ventures to take at fb.com/SyedSujoy.