

# MUNLAI

## community tourism done right



The bug to run for the hills might not bite often, but when it does, it gets us dancing on our toes, does it not? Nothing beats going to the remote incline somewhere behind the veil of clouds high up over the lush green. What is the swiftest way to such a spot on the unexpected long weekend? Why of course, a hop skip away in Bandarban is the Munlai Para.

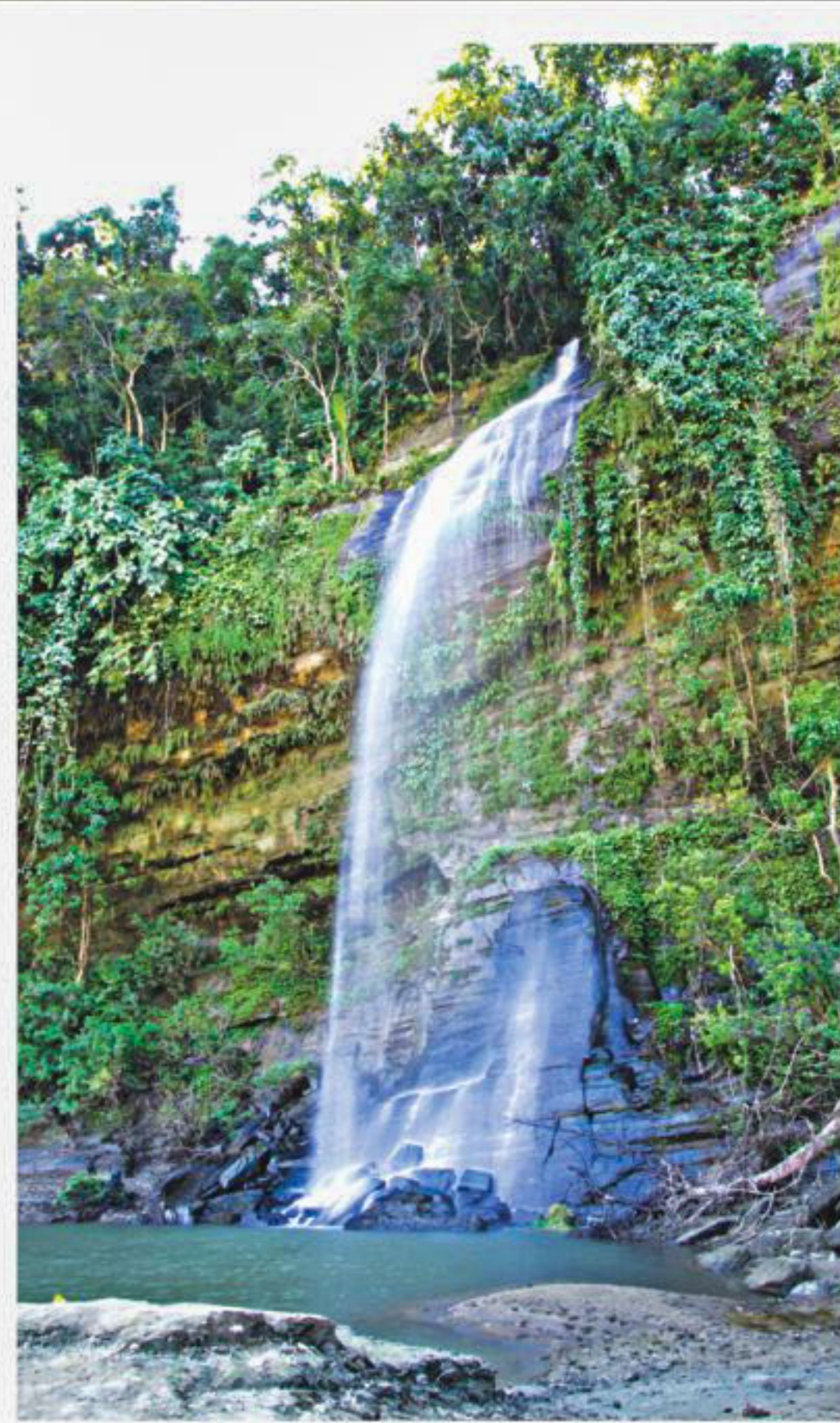
On a more practical note, the road to Munlai is through Chittagong, either a drive or flight, and the rest can be on a chartered jeep. Regardless of the mode, the winding ride through the lush green hills brings joy to the city-weary senses even before you reach the destination—a homestay specialty resort with a community tourism programme involving the Bawm.

"On our visits to various destinations abroad, we often saw a different sort of tourism model than the one we were used to in Bangladesh. This community tourism model was quite interesting in its richness and variety, and so, we thought to do something like this in Bangladesh," says Tamzid Siddiq Spondon, Munlai's Managing Director. Munlai Para resort tourism services are offered and operated by the same minds behind Basecamp in Gazipur, the country's first resort offering various tree-top and other such activities.

The most interesting element however is that the resort can be a two-in-one opportunity, to have a relaxing few days to unwind, or seek some thrill into the pristine and untouched Bandarban valleys.

### **HOMESTAY**

Munlai is a resort with a difference—not only does it promise to deliver a charm-



ingly rustic experience of the simple lives of the Bawm community, so much in harmony with their surroundings, but also offers all necessary modern amenities as well as a system to benefit the locals for their hospitality.

The accommodations offered to visitors are all made of organic materials, perfect for creating the raw and rustic charm of living in proximity to open nature. The quaint interiors are beautifully done in a simple and clutter-free way, with warm lighting and minimalist décor. The services offered at Munlai lets you experience the natural and authentic elements of the indigenous Bawm culture without compromising on comfort, hygiene or modern amenities. The community members are also trained on housekeeping and etiquette and are hospitable.

"Over the years of visiting Bandarban, and especially this village of the Bawm, we

grew a rapport with the local population. We saw that due to the seasonal nature of agriculture in the hills, and the difficulty of the terrain, many of the Bawm suffered considerable hardship during the off-season. That is when we thought that a responsible tourist facility here could be a good idea," Tamzid says.

Now the residents have, with monetary support and on a profit sharing basis, created the facilities for tourists to stay within the actual indigenous homes, and experience their lifestyle upfront, all the while benefiting the Bawm themselves.

### **FOOD**

Food is a very important and carefully



curated element of the Munlai experience, with each item being infused with local traditions and rich flavours of the hill people's food. That's not to say that mainland cuisine is not available, after all, comfort is often found in the familiar fragrances of one's favourite food.

Local delicacies like the Chonmong cooked in bamboo, and the black or white binni rice items, are on offer, along with other interesting local cuisine.