

The World's Greatest Journey by Boat

**NAHALY NAFISA KHAN &
 AZMIN AZRAN**

"What are you going to do on a boat for two days?"

The question was valid, and we didn't have an answer. But when schedules aligned for our group of eight friends – an unlikely occurrence for a cohort of individuals who are either university students, young professionals, or both – we took a leap of faith and jumped at the opportunity to leave Dhaka. It was a good leap.

Rangamati is a town that is very much dictated by the Kaptai lake. *Mawrum*, a 77-foot long and 19-foot wide diesel-engine boat on the Kaptai, would show us the sights and wonders of Rangamati. We got on the boat and settled ourselves down on a picturesque deck lounge, and the boat finally started to pull away from shore. The hum of the engine could hardly drown out our buzz of excitement, and when the hot and sappy weather became a cool breeze under a bright sun, we realised what we were going to do for two days on a boat – relax.

The sights were breathtaking. Cascading greenery sloping down the sides of small hills had the effect of creating winding waterways, and as we felt beholden to nature for its offerings, ever more breathtaking sights revealed themselves from behind the hills. At one point, one of the writers found themselves with a sore throat from all the gasping – their breath was truly taken.

A big part of the first day was spent in and around the Shuvolong waterfalls, where we were lucky to encounter strong currents. The water, which was the perfect temperature for dipping toes, washed away any remnant city-induced tension. Back on the boat, most of us felt truly calm and at one with the laid back attitude that life on a boat forces its inhabitants to adopt. The rest were asleep.



PHOTO: ANUPOMA JOYEETA JOYEE

This entire trip took place mid-week, which is an odd choice on the face of it, but we were a group well versed with the moon calendar, or at least we remembered to Google when the next full moon was before planning. Our first night on *Mawrum* was the second night of the Harvest Moon. In anticipation of a moonlit soiree, the boat was docked on what felt like the perfect spot. Against a mound of land jutting out of the lake, we had the expanse of the lake to one side and an imposing silhouette of wild overgrowth on the other.

As darkness finally broke and the moon peeked out from behind silver clouds, we celebrated. Little by little,

moonlight revealed small fishing boats in the distance, dark against the sparkling golden water that reflected the moonlight back to us in a million different angles. All the songs of lunar devotion we knew escaped our throats, and for a while, we sang at the top of our lungs. Then we just murmured into the night, eventually falling silent and letting the moon do the talking. Some of us slept on the deck that night; we had to.

By the second day, lounging on the roof of the boat turned out to be a fan favourite activity, with the wind in our faces and the feeling of being on top of the world. There were extensive safety

precautions to be maintained, like staying away from the railings and constant supervision by the staff. But safety wasn't an inhibitor to fun, on the contrary, it was quite the addition.

On the day, we decided to dock for a swim. Our group, comedically lacking in swimming skills, found out that mandatory life jackets meant we can float around in the water (in shallow depths of course) without being scared. After that, it was all rainbows and butterflies. It was as if we were in a Studio Ghibli film universe. Lying on the water bed, we saw the sky changing colours with the sunlight peeking through tree leaves, making patterns as if wanting to be let into our hearts as a muse while we kept chasing the clouds.

After four hours of pretending to be fishes, we recreated evolution by rediscovering the function of our feet. It was silly, it was a bit stupid, it was assisted swimming, but it was overwhelming. It made us realise the mundane insignificance of our existence in the grander scheme of things. The experience destroyed the self we carried to *Mawrum* from Dhaka in the most terrifyingly beautiful way possible. One of us grew new skin.

Another highlight of the trip was the food during our stay on *Mawrum*. It was cooked according to local tradition, and every meal was mind-blowingly delicious. Whether it was the bamboo chicken, the fish, the bamboo curry or the curry prepared from banana cones, the dishes were an absolute delight.

As we write this travelogue at our office and look back at this journey, we realise it had been nothing less than an ethereal experience. We all left parts of our souls on *Mawrum*, and in the depths of the Kaptai, in between the hills. In our hearts, we are still in the "*Lal Paharir Desh*."

To find out more, visit facebook.com/mawrumboatlife



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA