

Bangladesh's well-known haats

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#FESTIVITIES

"Haat-baar" or the weekly/fortnightly bazaars aka market day are a concept enshrined in the fabric of traditional rural Bengal. In the olden times, artisans and traders of various wares would travel from one region to another, peddling their products for just the day or two, before moving on swiftly to the next haat. Typically, the market set up and pack up were such quick affairs, to listen to a description of their appearance and disappearance sounded astounding indeed, and is quite fascinating to witness even now.

In modern times, with brick and mortar shops everywhere, abundance of shopping malls in the cities, and of course online shopping, things are quite different for consumers. But, there remains a significance of the traditional haats still,

and many of us bound within our city homes are unaware of the sheer hustle bustle and excitement that these haats still carry.

They serve as hubs of commerce and stores of tradition all at the same time. Of course, there were traditional haats in all regions of Bengal, but here are a few well-known to people even outside of the home regions.

Tangail and Pabna taant haats

Taant or the handloom and cloth woven on that was an integral part of life in rural Bengal, and there were taanti-baris and weekly haat with taantis all over the region. They would sell saris, gamchas and lungis of a cornucopia of vibrant colours. Each area had its own traditional speciality

in the texture and designs of the items produced by the local weavers. Many of them thrive even today, and very well-known among these are the ones in places like Korotia, which is more than 200 years old, and Baburhat in Tangail, both famous for Tangail cotton taant saris. The Korotia haat was established by the local Panni zamindars to accommodate the flourishing trade in taant saris at the time, on an area of nearly 200 bighas. The haat used to feature all sorts of rural produce at the time. It has evolved into a taant specialised hub over time, and has shrunk in size but grown in importance in the handloom trade. Tangail haat is also known for high quality Jamdanis and Benaroshis along with taant.

Ataikula and Shahzadpur haat in Sirajganj and Pabna, with their very own collection of taant items, often noted for a wider breadth compared to other areas'

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looms, and specific patterns on the paar or edge, are two such significant haats of handloom saris. Taant saris in pure cotton and intricate designs can be found for as low as Tk 400 with finer versions being pricier. Now versions of power loomed saris in silk and half silk are also available.

Chandpur fish haat

What combination of food from the Bangladeshi cuisine is more emblematic of the culture than rice and fish? So, it is no wonder that there are numerous fish markets in the country, all along the coastal belt such as those in Khulna as well as the larger towns near river banks of the Padma and Jamuna. But most well-known amongst these is the fish market in Chandpur, and aptly so, as the town sits at the largest confluence of major rivers in the country, and has direct access to the Bay of Bengal.

This means lucky shoppers at this market get to choose from a vast array of fresh and salt water fish every single day, and supplies are sent off to markets all over the country as well.

Rajshahi's mango haat

Mango is a beloved fruit of most Bengalis, and grows in a lot of places. But nowhere in Bangladesh will one see such expansive swathes of land with rows upon rows of neatly planted mango trees, orchards lining the roadsides one after another for miles — as far as the eyes can see. One of the largest hubs of mango on a wholesale level is at Baneshwar, where thousands of tonnes of mangoes are bought and sold every day during the harvest season. Different kinds of mangoes are heaped onto vans and trucks, and packed into baskets as well to be sent off to fruit markets all over the country.

Munshiganj's wood houses

The idea of moving an entire house by attaching flying gas balloons to it might have been a children's fantasy in the animation movie "Up," but it is not too far from the truth for a very interesting kind of house sold in the haats of Mushiganj, like the one in Louhajang.

Houses of different sizes, fully built on wood and tin, are put on display here for customers to browse and check tangibly. Then the entire structure is taken apart panel by panel, transported to the buyer's address, and assembled on the spot.

The tradition of these movable houses emerged for the frequent river erosion by the numerous large rivers in the area, for which locals adapted by making homes which can be moved away from the danger zone fairly quickly.

The houses are often aesthetically pleasing, with intricate lattice work on the edges of the roof and carvings around the door and window panels, soothing shades of tin trimmed with naturally varnished wood.

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