



DEBOTAKHUM

where tranquillity reigns

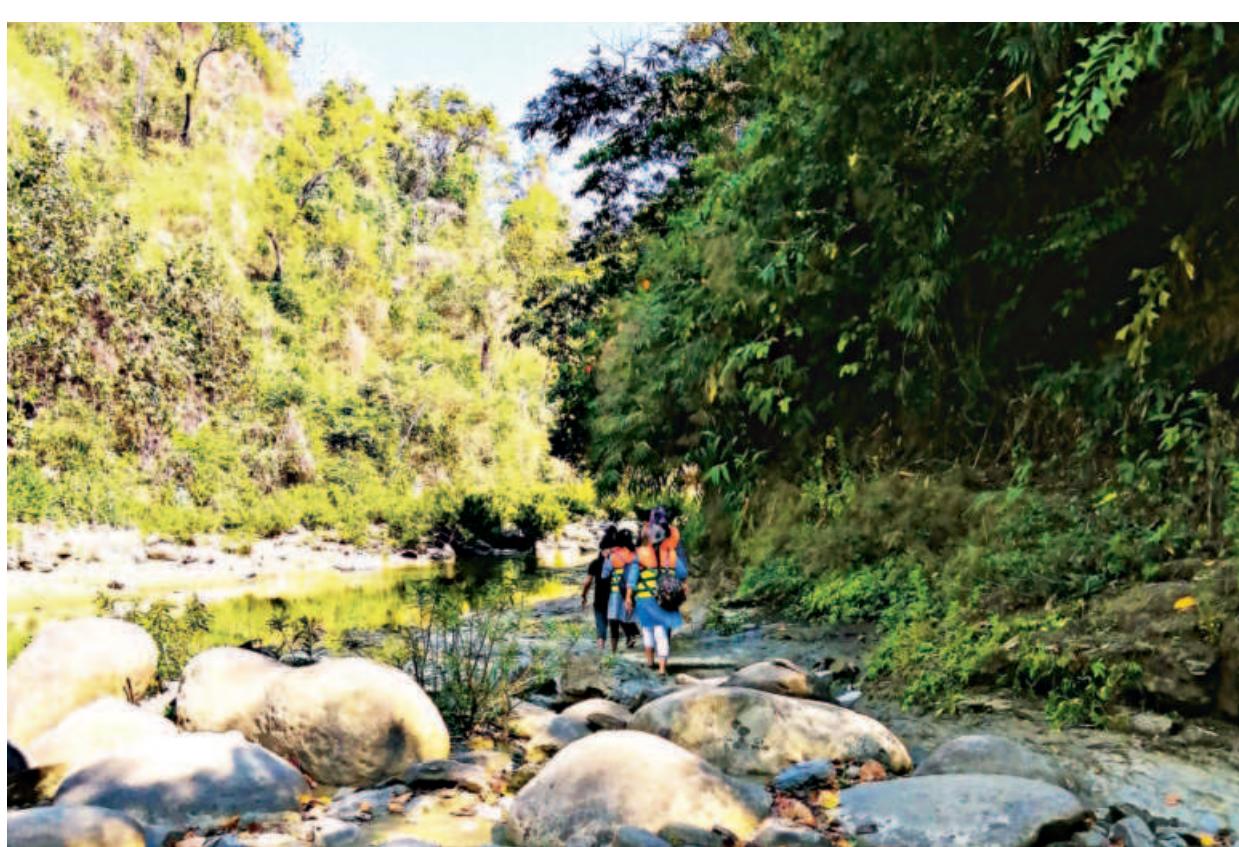
After a few minutes, the atmosphere got eerily quiet as we moved deep inside the reservoir. The narrow waterway between steep hills was blocking most of the sunlight, creating a mysterious realm of light and shade. It almost felt like an adventure. All we could hear was silence except the chorus of insects and the splashing of waters made by our paddles.

HABIBA MITUN

Bandarban is the ultimate destination for travel and adventure lovers in Bangladesh. With a relatively unspoiled mountainous landscape, the district offers various trails to trekkers for hiking through tropical jungles and valleys.

The district also hosts several khums -- the indigenous Marma word for natural water reservoir -- deep inside the mountains. These khums serve as the much-needed water source for the people around the area. The beauty of these khums also attracts tourists willing to take the challenge of trekking.

This story is about my visit to Debotakhum, one of the most beautiful khums in Bandarban. Locals also call it "Sonakhum" and "Thongchikhum". Located in Roangchori Upazilla, the khum is approximately 600 feet long and, according to locals, nearly 50-70 feet deep. This remote khum is situated between rocky hills, which rise vertically over 100 metres adding to its beauty.



monotonous routine. More than ever, I was eager to go close to nature, I wanted to breathe fresh air, walk in the woods, and hike through the mountains.

After some discussions on probable destinations, my sister and I opted for Debotakhum, a place where I visited before. On my first trip, there were so many tourists that I couldn't feel the silence of nature. And I was also travelling with a group.

So, this time, we decided to go by ourselves. One fine morning, we packed our bags and boarded a bus bound for Bandarban from Chattogram. We were a bit concerned because we had never travelled "alone" before. But the concerns couldn't prevent us from a sound sleep on the bus.

We got off the bus around 9:30 and called a local guide. But the news we heard was disappointing. More than 100 tourists were visiting that place that day.

As we were determined to enjoy the serenity of nature, we decided to wait a day. We spent the rest of the day visiting nearby tourist spots in Bandarban such as Meghla, Nilachal and Ruposhi Jhorna.

The next morning, we started early for Roangchori. The hired four-wheel-drive jeep locally known as Chander Gari was on time. It took us about an hour to arrive in Roangchori Upazila. With a form in his hand our guide, Ohainu da, was waiting for us outside the police station. We filled out that form and went to give it to the police

officer.

"Are you sure you guys can go there alone?" the officer inquired as he quickly skimmed through the application. We both immediately nodded, and we were given permission. Once more we got into Chander Gari with Ohainu da. Kocchoptoli was our next destination.

The Chander Gari ride was an adventure by itself. The roller coaster ride through the zigzag hilly roads was worth the risk. It was just 10:00 am when we reached Kocchoptoli. Following a little breakfast, we proceeded to take the mandatory permission from the army camp and faced the same question: "Can you two go alone?"

We came this far for nothing and replied affirmatively with confidence. But this time the permission came with a clause. Our guide was ordered to return by 5:00 pm.

From here the walking trail starts. After a short walk, we arrived at a Marma bazar, from where the trail takes two routes: one is hilly, and the other goes along a jhiri (small stream). As it rained heavily the day before, we choose the steep route.

Since we were hiking up a steep trail in the sun, it wasn't enjoyable at first. After going up for a while, the trail became somewhat bearable. As the number of trees grew, a soothing shade enveloped us. A cool breeze was blowing and our ears were soothed by the sounds of the mountain.

We arrived at Shilbandha Para after one and a half hours of trekking. The

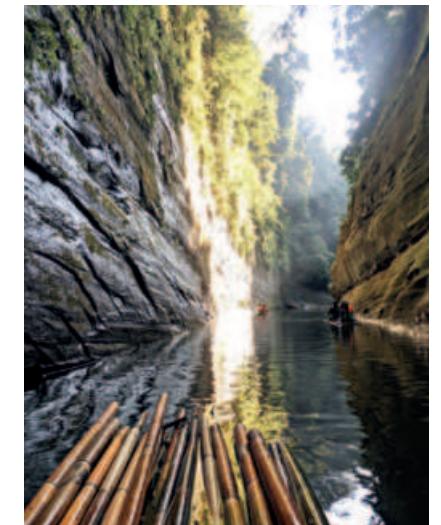
residents in this tidy neighbourhood (para) were quite friendly. While relaxing in a loft, a smiling old face caught my eye. I tried to talk to her but she didn't understand a single word and kept smiling. Saying her goodbye, we departed for Debotakhum, which was merely a 10-15-minute walk from the para.

There were few tourists that day, so we got a near-empty khum. My sister and I boarded a bamboo raft which Ohainu da managed in advance. He also joined us on another raft.

After a few minutes, the atmosphere got eerily quiet as we moved deep inside the reservoir. The narrow waterway between steep hills was blocking most of the sunlight, creating a mysterious realm of light and shade. It almost felt like an adventure. All we could hear was silence except the chorus of insects and the splashing of waters made by our paddles.

I lay down on the bamboo raft in the middle of the reservoir, looking up at the sky as the icy water touched my skin. I'm not sure if there was a debota (God) there, but I found what I sought: tranquillity.

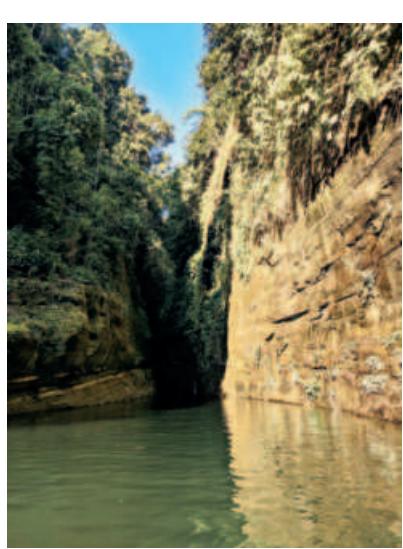
The sun was sinking. We had to



Habiba Mitun
 is a student of journalism at the University of Chittagong, and an avid traveller. She loves to explore places

There are several exciting myths among the locals about Debotakhum. According to one myth, once an old Marma man saw a gigantic turtle in this reservoir. The unnatural size of that turtle made him believe that it must be a debota (a Bengali word meaning god) who was residing in the khum disguised as a turtle. The locals still believe that their god is somewhere in Debotakhum.

It was 2020. After being locked up at home for 8 months due to unprecedented Covid restrictions, I, like most people, was desperate to breathe fresh air. In October, the government relaxed the lockdown for 2 months. And it was the opportunity I was looking for to break up the



return even though we didn't want to. We arrived at the army camp around 4:00 pm. While leaving, I told the army officer, "see sir, we did it alone and safely." He grinned.

Our Chander Gari was waiting and took us to Bandarban. That night we returned home to Chattogram.

How to go:

After reaching Bandarban by bus or car, you can hire a Chander Gari to Kocchoptoli.

Expenditures:

We had to spend approximately Tk 3,000 each. This trip from Chittagong can be managed for Tk 1,500 for a day trip and Tk 2,000 if you want to stay a night.

