

#TRAVEL

DISCOVER THE HIDDEN GEMS of Cox's Bazar beyond the beaches



For most of us, whenever the name Cox's Bazar is mentioned, the picture of the city comes into our minds pre-packaged. The longest stretch of sand during the golden hour of the day, with crowded sunsets and hotel balconies angled towards the sea.

You already painted the picture in your head while reading the description, thinking, "I have been there and done that." It is a place we visit with a checklist already written. The longest beach in the world. Fresh seafood. A few drone shots. A memory card full of the same horizon.

The road did not announce its arrival. There were no ticket counters, no souvenir stalls, no performative sense of welcome. Just green.

The walk up was short, but the reward felt disproportionate. From the top, the view opened into rolling green hills, small and uneven, stretching quietly into the distance. The air felt different, as if the city had loosened its grip in a way that made it easy to breathe deeply and feel the fresh air in your lungs after a long time. It was the first time during the trip that Cox's

A short distance away, the landscape shifted again. Wind turbines rose against the sky, slow and deliberate. Cox's Bazar's wind farm, with a capacity of around 60 megawatts, stands as a quiet contradiction to the idea that development here must always be extractive or exploitative. The turbines did not dominate the view as much as I expected. They existed alongside it. Turning steadily, harnessing something that was already there.

In a country still struggling to diversify its energy sources, this felt significant. Not



I went there to see what exists when you step slightly away from that horizon.

The decision was not driven by a sense of rebellion against popular tourism. It came from fatigue. I have written and read enough about Cox's Bazar to know how quickly a place can be flattened into an idea. The beach dominates the conversation so completely that every other nuance the city has gets sidelined. And yet, like most places in Bangladesh, Cox's Bazar is layered. You just have to be willing to look sideways instead of straight ahead.

The first hint of that came from a name I kept seeing on obscure travel forums and half-buried reels. Hajipara Forest Reservation Area. Fifteen minutes from the city, close enough to feel almost suspicious, yet rarely mentioned.

Bazar did not feel like a destination. It felt like a place where people truly live.

That feeling deepened in Rakhine Para, in the Chauflandi area. The Rakhine community has existed here for generations, often mentioned in passing. Walking through the park, it became clear how cultural coexistence works not through grand declarations, but through daily rhythm. Homes are arranged in a way that Rakhine culture dictates.

Walking down the lanes of the Rakhine para, what felt most genuine was the complete lack of care of the residents there. Imperfect in every sense, it was this very essence that made the place so intriguing. There was no performance of identity here, no attempt to package tradition for outsiders. Just everyday life unfolding.

in a press release way, but in a practical one. Sustainable tourism is often spoken about in abstract terms. Seeing renewable energy integrated into the landscape made the idea tangible. From there, the scent of dried fish announced Shutki Palli long before it came into view. Under the harsh sun, rows upon rows of fish lay exposed, transforming slowly through salt, heat, and time at the Najirartek Shutki Polli. Two young boys offered to walk us through the process.

