

# welcome to Bangladesh



## A Land of Rivers

Bangladesh is awash with rivers; more than 700 of them flow through this small country and the result is a deliciously lush landscape with more shades of green than you ever imagined. Flooding is an annual feature and by the end of the summer huge swathes of Bangladesh are submerged under rising water levels, leaving rich alluvial soils from which to grow next year's harvests. There are almost as many kilometres of rivers in Bangladesh as there are roads, and travelling by boat is a way of life here. For the traveller, this provides a fabulous opportunity to see the country from a more unusual angle. Arrive at a town by bus and you're confronted with traf-

fic, fumes, noise and confusion. Arrive by boat and it's almost like sneaking quietly through the back door. Even if you're going nowhere in particular, travelling by boat along a river in Bangladesh is one of the most rewarding things you can do during your visit. This is one of the world's most densely populated countries, but once you're sitting on a small wooden rowboat, floating slowing down a country river, it's easy to imagine you have it all to yourself.

## Warm & Welcoming

Bangladeshis are famously friendly, and you are almost certain to receive a warm welcome everywhere you go. Feeling like you're the centre of attention is, of course,

*Gorgeously green yet swamped with people, Bangladesh is a rural wonderland laden with waterways, peppered with villages and bursting with humanity.*

(left) Watering Zareen Tea Estate (p140)  
(below) Fishing at sunset



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a feature of travel in almost any part of south Asia, but it's sometimes coupled with a sense that your new 'friend' may want something from you. In Bangladesh, though, the fascination with you is genuine, and rarely will you suspect an ulterior motive. The tourism industry is in its infancy and foreign visitors are still an unusual sight outside Dhaka. If you enjoy making friends, mixing with the locals and having the opportunity to travel around a country without bumping into too many other foreign faces, then Bangladesh is probably just the place you've been looking for.

## Slow Down

This isn't a destination to be rushed. Poor infrastructure, an undeveloped tourist industry and the ubiquitous language barrier (not as many people speak English here as you might think) mean that you'll often be left frustrated if you're trying to travel in a hurry. So slow down; don't try to pack too much into your itinerary. Bangladesh isn't a tick-the-sights-off-the-list type of country. It's a place to relax, meet people and discover new ideas and ways of life. And for that you need time.