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Itineraries

Sampling the Sunderbans

One week is just enough time to dip into Dhaka before going on the boat trip of a lifetime through the tiger-filled mangrove swamps of the Sundarbans.

Ease yourself into Dhaka by spending your first day in the more upmarket neighbourhood of Banani before delving into the chaos with a sightseeing tour of Old Dhaka on day two. Don’t miss Sadarghat for a rowboat trip on the Buriganga River.

You haven’t got time to ride the Rocket paddle-wheel steamer (you’ll need an extra two days for that). Instead, take an overnight bus to Khulna to meet up with your Sundarbans tour company, which you’ll need in order to properly explore the Sundarbans National Park. Then relax on the deck of your boat and enjoy three days of tiger-tinged river adventure before floating back to Khulna.

Consider a day trip to Bagerhat before taking the bus back to Dhaka for one final day in the capital.

Note that you will need to have booked your Sundarbans trip at least three weeks in advance, so start planning this one from home.
Bangladesh is relatively small, so if you have a full month you can see pretty much all the main highlights. This tour takes in Dhaka, the Sundarbans and part of history-rich Rajshahi, plus the tea estates of Srimangal and the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Your first job when you arrive in Dhaka is to book your cabin on the Rocket for your ferry ride the following evening. Tickets in hand, you can spend the rest of that day and the next taking in the sights of Old Dhaka before leaving on the 6pm boat.

Sit back and enjoy the lazy 16-hour river trip to Hularhat. Having disembarked mid-morning, grab a rickshaw to the bus stand, then a bus to Bagerhat. Spend the afternoon admiring Islamic ruins before hopping on another bus to Khulna, where you’ll meet your Sundarbans tour company. Note: you will need to have booked your Sundarbans trip at least three weeks in advance.

The next morning, board your tour boat and enjoy three or four days of unrivalled river adventure as you track tigers in the mangrove forests of Sundarbans National Park.

Back in Khulna, take a bus north, pit-stopping in Kushtia – the cultural capital of Bengal – before continuing on to Rajshahi. Take a day trip to Sona Masjid to see the scattered ruins of the ancient city of Gaud before catching a bus to Bogra. There’s not much to see here – although you could consider an unusual day trip to the sand chars on the Jamuna River – but Bogra is only a day trip away from the Unesco-protected Buddhist ruins of Paharpur.

Catch a bus from Bogra back to Dhaka, but don’t dally; the next morning you’ll be river-bound again, this time a morning ferry from Dhaka’s Sadarghat to Chandpur before catching the train to Chittagong.

Sort out your permit for the hill tracts region with a tour company a week ahead of time, then spend four or five days exploring Rangamati and Bandarban before heading back to Chittagong.

Take the scenic day train to Srimangal where you can enjoy the surrounding tea estates, forest reserves and Adivasi villages before catching the train back to Dhaka.
The most diverse region of Bangladesh, Chittagong has mountains, forests, Adivasi villages, elephants and even beaches. This tour has the lot.

After a day visiting the must-see sights of Dhaka, hop on a morning ferry to Chandpur, from where you can catch a train to Chittagong. Apply for your permit for the hill tracts here before taking the bus to Cox’s Bazar where you can rest up by the beach and even go surfing – but don’t forget to visit Maheskhali Island.

Heading further south, catch a bus to Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary, home to some of Bangladesh’s few remaining wild elephants, before riding the waves to St Martin’s Island.

Return to Chittagong to collect your travel permit, then head for laid-back Rangamati for a couple of relaxing days by Kaptai Lake. From Rangamati, take a bus to Bandarban, the heart of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and the best place to base yourself for hiking.

There are buses from the Hill Tracts direct to Dhaka, but we’d suggest taking the scenic route back to Chittagong and then catching a train to Dhaka from there.

The Ruins of the Northwest

This tour points you towards the older side of Dhaka before exploring the dusty ruins of history-rich Rajshahi and Rangpur.

Spend your first day visiting the museums and Raj-era architecture of central Dhaka before diving into the living history of Old Dhaka. Try to track down the hard-to-find ruins of Bara Katra and Chota Katra among the chaos of the bazaars. A day trip to Sonargaon makes an easy day three before you set off by bus to the temple-strewn village of Puthia, en route to Rajshahi.

Day trip from Rajshahi to Sona Masjid, to see the scattered ruins of the lost city of Gaud, before catching the bus to Bogra. The ruined settlement of Mahasthangarh makes a fun half-day trip before you head to the Unesco-protected Buddhist ruins of Paharpur, where you can stay the night.

From Paharpur, take a bus to Dinajpur (via Jaipurhat and Fulbari) so you can visit the stunning Hindu temple of Kantanagar before heading to nearby Rangpur, which has a sprinkling of Raj-era architecture, a top-class guesthouse and a daily train to Dhaka.

Chittagong & the South Coast

2 WEEKS

The Ruins of the Northwest

2 WEEKS

Chittagong & the South Coast
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- Capital (State/Province)
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- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

*Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book*
OUR STORY
A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, Across Asia on the Cheap. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing, Dublin and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

OUR WRITERS

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Paul has contributed to over 25 Lonely Planet guidebooks, and worked as a tour guide in countries from Turkey to Morocco. In a previous life he may even have been a molecular biologist. For Lonely Planet he’s covered swathes of the subcontinent from both sides of the Khyber Pass to Rajasthan and Kashmir, so was pleased to finally add Bangladesh to his tally. Follow @paulclammer on Twitter.

Anirban Mahapatra
A Bangla speaker by birth, a folk music aficionado by taste and a kachchi biryani lover by choice, Anirban has made repeated forays into the green landscape of Bangladesh. He has experienced its amazing variety, from riding a boat into tiger territory in the Sundarbans and socialising with wandering Bauls in Kushtia, to sipping aromatic tea in Sylhet and exploring ancient citadels in Rajshahi and Rangpur. Anirban has also written for multiple editions of Lonely Planet’s India guidebook.