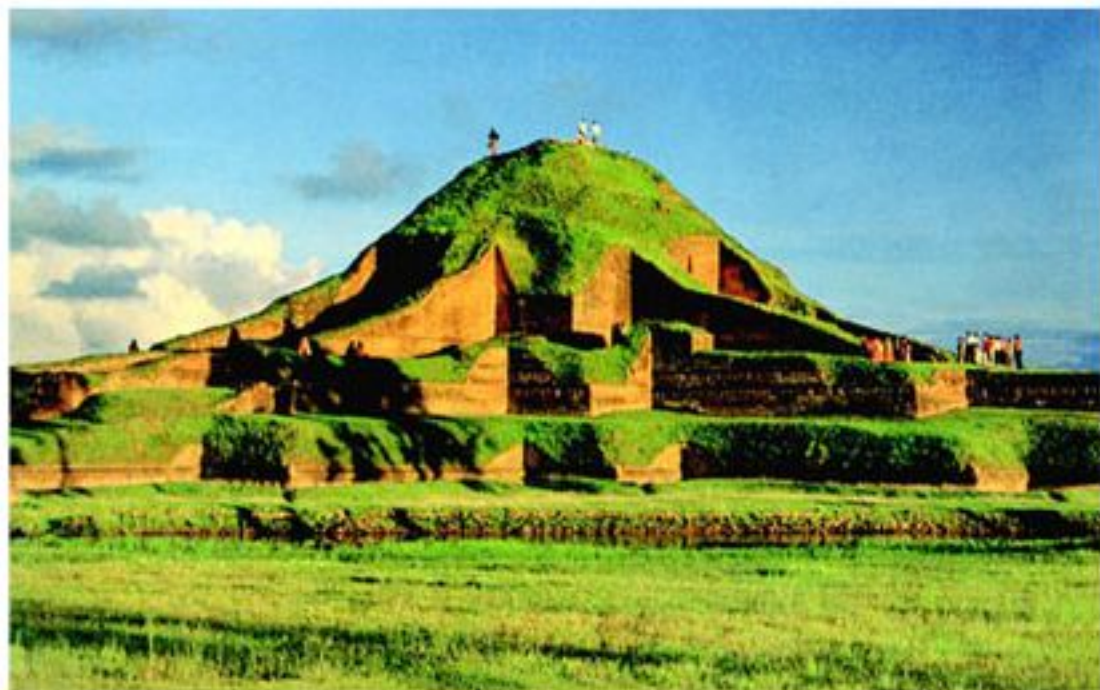


# Bangladesh

Edited by Motaz Othman / ITM – Jordan officie



Dakha is the capital, populations are around 33 million, 83% Islam, 16% Hindu. The climate of Bangladesh is subtropical and tropical with days still averaging 25°C (77°F) in January, 35°C (95°F) in April and lingering around the 30°C (86°F) mark for most of the year. Bangladesh has three main seasons: the monsoon or 'wet' season from late May to early October; the 'cold' season from mid-October to the end of February; and the 'hot' season (known in Bangladesh as the 'little rainy season') from mid-March to mid-May. There is also a 'cyclone season' - May to June and October to November.

Bangladesh visas are valid for six months from the date of issue and are good for stays of one or three months. The process can be arbitrary and time consuming, so check details and leave time to arrange things.

### **Attractions:**

#### **Cox's Bazar**

Bangladesh's only beach resort is near the Myanmar border in an area where Rohingya refugees have settled to escape persecution in Myanmar. It has a

Burmese Buddhist flavour and ever increasing amenities to service the visitors attracted by its enormous expanse of shark-free beach

Even modestly clad bathers, especially females, should expect to be gawked at by locals. South of Cox's Bazar are more secluded beaches such as Himacheri and Inani where having a swim can still be a private experience. Note that the beaches are not considered entirely safe at night.





## Dhaka

The intriguing capital city of Bangladesh sits on the north bank of the bustling Buriganga River, roughly in the centre of the country. The oldest section of the city runs along the north bank of the waterfront and was developed when Dhaka was a significant Moghul trading centre.

Dhaka's premier attraction is Lalbagh Fort, an unfinished fort dating from 1678 located in the Old City. The National Museum is north of the Old City in the old European zone known as Modern City. It has fascinating displays of Bangladesh's Hindu, Buddhist and Moghul past, art and handicrafts.

## Mainimati Ruins

Famous as an important centre of Buddhist culture from the 7th to 12th centuries, the buildings excavated here were made wholly of baked bricks. There are more than 50 scattered Buddhist sites, but the three most important are Salban Vihara, Kotila Mura and Charpatra Mura.

Salban Vihara was a well-planned, 170 sq m (182 sq ft) monastery facing a temple in the centre of the courtyard. Nearby

is a museum housing the finds excavated here, which include terracotta plaques, bronze statues, a bronze casket, coins, jewellery and votive stupas embossed with Buddhist inscriptions.

Kotila Mura comprises three large stupas representing Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the 'Three Jewels of Buddhism'.

The most important discovery at Charpatra Mura were four royal copper-plate decrees, three belonging to Chandra rulers, the





other to Sri Viradhara Deva, a the most impressive later Hindu king. archaeological site in Bangladesh, and covers some ruins are within a military 11 hectares (27 acres). cantonment and cannot be Although in an advanced state of visited without permission from military officers. decay, the overall plan of the temple complex is easy to figure out and includes a large quadrangle with the monks' cells forming the walls and enclosing a courtyard. From the centre of the courtyard rises the 20m (66ft) high remains of a stupa

### **Somapuri Vihara**

The 8th-century Somapuri Vihara at Paharpur was formerly the biggest Buddhist monastery south of the Himalaya. It's by far

which dominates the surrounding countryside.

The monastery's recessed walls are embellished with well-preserved terracotta bas-reliefs, and a small museum houses a representative display of the domestic and religious objects found during excavations.

### **Sundarbans National Park**

The Sundarbans is the largest littoral mangrove belt in the world, stretching 80km (49.7mi) into the hinterland from the coast and including some of the last remaining stands of the mighty Gangetic Plain jungles. Wildlife includes deer, crocodiles, river dolphins and the mighty Bengal tiger. You can organise a guided tour of the region from Dhaka, Mongla or Khulna. Although Dhaka International Airport is far from being a major Asian crossroads, there are plenty of international flights. Indeed, many travellers use Dhaka as the gateway to the Indian subcontinent to take





advantage of cheap fares from Europe. Bangkok and Kolkata are the main destinations for flights in and out of Bangladesh. The situation with overland crossings to/from India is vague. The main crossings are at Benapole-Haridispur (on the Kolkata route) and Tamabil-Dawki (on the Shillong route). If officials tell you that you cannot cross elsewhere, be sceptical, insistent but polite, since travellers have been crossing in small numbers at Hili-Balurghat, Godagari-Lalgola and several other border crossings. Overland routes between the subcontinent and Myanmar have been closed since the early 1950s. Even if the border was to be opened in the future, it's likely that all the formerly navigable roads across the frontier have long since been devoured by the jungle. The Myanmar army has also planted landmines along the border. A change of route permit is required for travellers who entered Bangladesh by air but leave by land.

## Getting around

Internal transport in Bangladesh is cheap. The rule is: if you want a seat, get there early and be assertive and be patient. Biman and GMG have flights radiating from Dhaka to cities, including Chittagong and Cox's Bazar. Flights are cheap but are still more than three times 1st-class train fares

Bangladesh has a fairly extensive system of passable roads but they are crammed with buses. Bus drivers in Bangladesh are among the

world's most reckless, as evidenced by the incredible number of bus accidents occurring every day. Trains are a lot easier on the nerves, knees and backside, and those plying the major routes are actually quite good, at least in 1st class. However, travelling by rail between Dhaka and points west is quite complicated for three reasons: unbridged rivers requiring crossing by ferry, circuitous routing, and differing gauges between the east and west sections of the country.







The distinguishing feature of times a week, but there are internal travel in Bangladesh is plenty of other fascinating ferries the presence of a well-developed and well-used system of water transport, though travelling by boat is slow. A trip to Bangladesh which does not include taking a trip down a river is like going to the Alps and not skiing or hiking. The famous (though slightly accident-prone) 'Rocket' paddlewheel steamer runs from Dhaka to Khulna four

Self-drive cars are not available in Bangladesh. It is, however, inexpensive to hire chauffeur-driven cars in major cities. In cities you'll find rickshaws and auto-rickshaws, which are inexpensive once the compulsory bargaining process is completed.