



Poetry In Motion

Dhaka's lack of tourists guarantees an authentic and genuinely touching experience.



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- 1. Guests on the Ultimate Winery Experience can enjoy outdoor wine tastings surrounded by beautiful countryside.
- 2. Fowles Wine Cellar Door Café offers a selection of award-winning wines paired with game meats.
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TO SAY THAT DHAKA IS CROWDED IS AN UNDERSTATEMENT.

A visit here is guaranteed to jolt every sense and thrust you headfirst into a cacophony of human sound and motion.

Look Around

Puran Dhaka, or Old Dhaka, is the heart of the maelstrom, full of historical sites, photogenic alleyways and bazaars, and a non-stop blur of colourful rickshaws. Expect to get hopelessly lost and yet be assured that there will always be plenty of locals to point you in the right direction. Check out the Ahsan Manzil, better known as the Pink Palace, a former residence of the Nawab of Dhaka, built in 1872 in Neoclassical-Oriental style. Nearby, wander labyrinthian alleys that lead to the Star Mosque, a small Mughal-style

mosque that features porcelain tiles decorated with images of Mount Fuji (the mosque was redecorated years ago by a local businessman who purchased art tiles from Japan)! Nearby is the last vestige of an Armenian community that ran the jute and leather trade in Dhaka in the 17th century. The community is now gone but its 1781 Church of the Holy Resurrection still stands, along with its adjoining graveyard. Also worth checking out in Old Dhaka is the Lalbagh Fort, an uncompleted but magnificent 17th-century Mughal fort and mausoleum that retains its aura of centuries past.

Explore The River

The Buriganga, or Old Ganges, is the lifeline of Dhaka. Heavily polluted, it is nevertheless incredibly atmospheric. Stroll around Sadarghat, the main hub in Old Dhaka, and you'll see thousands of rowboats taking workers and commuters back and forth, sandwiched amid huge launches and other ferries which are vital for travel. You can hire a rowboat for an hour to navigate along shipyards and brick factories or just join the commuters travelling to the other side, but the real way to go is to book a passage on the Rocket, a colonial paddle steamer dating from the early 20th century. Run on diesel, the paddle steamers were the fastest methods of travel back then, hence the moniker 'Rocket,' but these days, they are a nostalgic and captivating way to watch rural riverine life pass by. Overnight journeys go to Bharisal, where there are floating markets, to Hularhat, from where you can visit the ancient UNESCO Heritage Site of Bagerhat, named one of the 'lost' cities of the world, and farther on, to track Bengali tigers in the Sunderbans National Park.

Eat Like A Local

Bengali cuisine shares similarities with its Indian neighbour. You'll find plenty of *dal*, *roti*, and a variety of curries to keep you full. Join the crowds in Old Dhaka and head to the original branch of Haji Biryani, where an 80-year-old hole-in-the-wall shop run by the third-generation grandson of the founder attracts about 2,000 customers each day, with the 30-sheep-

Fast Facts

The city was formerly the **Mughal capital of Bengal**

Known as the **city of mosques.**

Islam is the official religion.

Previously part of Pakistan, the **flag of Bangladesh** was first raised on 2 March 1971.

Cricket is a much-loved sport.

DHAKA

Bangladesh



Travel Tips

- Bangladesh's currency is the **Taka**. Both moneychangers and ATMs can be found at the airport and all over the city.
- The best time to visit is during the **November to February** winter season, when temperatures are cooler and there is less rain. Prepare to get wet if you come during the summer monsoon.
- Steel yourself for the traffic. Pass the time by appreciating the **rickshaw art** in the old city, and if out near the airport, opt for **Uber** over the maniacal CNGs (compressed natural gas *tuk tuks*); it is safer and actually cheaper.
- Outside the **Gulshan** embassy district, there are virtually **no street signs**. It's better to tell rickshaw drivers the district you are going to rather than the name of a shop (which they often won't know). You will get completely lost in **Old Dhaka**, but the locals are some of the friendliest people, so you'll never be far from help.



worth-of-meat mutton biryani usually sold out well before closing (there's also a fancier branch up near the airport). Following an old Mughal recipe, mustard oil is used to flavour the rice instead of butter. To sample some of Bangladesh's best *bhorta* (flat bean, potato, or vegetable mash made with pungent mustard oil) and fresh roti and paratha breads, visit the nearby Al Razzaque and also Nirob, hotel restaurants that are perpetually packed with locals.

Chic Eats

Head up to Banani and Gulshan, where the embassies and fancy hotels are located, to sample Dhaka's fine-dining scene. Options include more upscale biryanis at Fakruddin and elegant Bengali dining at The Dining Room at Calcutta Club. For Bangladesh's best pizza and Italian, Spaghetti Jazz is an intimate mainstay, and Pan Tao is legendary for Thai food. For a Japanese sashimi splurge, those in the know head to Izumi. There's also a new branch of the renowned Indian Kebab Factory in the Jamuna Future Park Mall.

Go For A Ride

There are over 500,000 rickshaws in Dhaka; in the old city, they are the only way to get around the labyrinth of crowded narrow streets. While rickshaws abound elsewhere in Asia, here they rule the roost and are adorned in gaily hand-painted art, which individual drivers relish with pride. You might swoon the first time you ride one into the chaos, but you'll soon realise how adept and patient the drivers are, and going for a ride is actually one of the top highlights of any Dhaka visit.

Shop

While in Old Dhaka, join the throngs in Shankharia Bazar, a Hindu market street named for the *shankharis* (Hindu artisans), where you can buy bangles made from conch shells, kites, and jewellery. Wander along Bangshal Road, better known as Bicycle Street, and buy a rickshaw art painting as a real Dhaka memento. For textiles, the Chandni

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Malaysia Airlines operates twice daily flights from Kuala Lumpur (KUL) to Dhaka (DAC), Bangladesh



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Chowk Market is incredibly vibrant and constantly thronged. More upscale offerings of traditional embroideries and fine folk handicrafts without the crowds can be found at Jatra, which specialises in handwoven and handmade clothing, crafts, and toys, or Aranya, which does both ladies' and menswear using natural dyes. For modern shopping, head to Bangladesh's biggest mall, the fancy Jamuna Future Park.

Celebrate

Dhaka is home to an array of cultural festivals during the cool season (November to February). The Lit Fest brings prominent writers from around the globe, and music lovers should come for the four-day Bengal Classical Music Festival, Dhaka Folk Fest, or the Dhaka Jazz and Blues Fest, all held in November. Come in April for Pohela Boishakh, the Bengali New Year, or for a wild mass of humanity, Chaand Raat and Eid Al-Fitr, both celebrating the end of Ramadan each year.

Princely Sleeps

For a good night's rest, stay in Gulshan or Banani, the expat and embassy areas in the north of the city. The Radisson Blu Water Garden is built on three hectares of lush gardens; if you want to stay in the heart of the upscale restaurant district, Four Points by Sheraton has 150 well-appointed rooms set over the Gulshan Circle. For something a bit more modest but closer to all the action in the old city, opt for a room at Hotel 71, which offers all-day check-in and handles midnight requests.

Cup Of Cha

Bars in Dhaka are few and far between, either in fancy hotels or dingy men-only places. Forego your mojitos for the weekend and join the locals in drinking tea at corner stalls. Rickshaw drivers often drink 20 cups a day, and you can opt for sweetened milk *dudh cha*, as it's called here, or else *lal cha*, which is without milk and sometimes infused with spices like ginger or cardamom.

About the writer/photographer

Dave is an American travel writer and photographer based in Bangkok, Thailand. His work has appeared in *Lonely Planet* and *Condé Nast Traveler* among others. He is the author of *Odysseus' Last Stand*, winner of the Silver Medal for Travel Book of the Year from the Society of American Travel Writers.

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