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ACCOMMODATION

There are international-standard hotels in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet, but most accommodation is well down the price scale.

Couples, married or not, shouldn't plan a dirty weekend in Bangladesh. Most midrange and top-end hotels will have no problems with you sharing a room, but most of the time you'll find it contains only two single beds. Some budget hotels refuse to allow unmarried couples to stay and many of them are not very welcoming to single women travellers. If you are in a couple (married or not) and one of you is of Bangladeshi or Indian descent, you may well have trouble getting a room of any description in any hotel – including in some of Dhaka's most expensive establishments!

PRACTICALITIES

- The *Daily Star's* supplementary magazine on Fridays is a good source of information on what's going on in Dhaka.
- Almost every hotel TV is satellite TV.
- Electricity (when there is electricity) is 220V, 50 Hz AC and is either a two-pronged connection with round rather than flat holes or a three-pin UK-style plug but rounder and with thicker pins.
- Officially Bangladesh is metric, but some local measures are still used. For instance, a *seer* equals 850g and a *maund* is 37kg. Yards are interchanged with metres, and miles are often confused with kilometres.

Prices are often characterised as 'with air-con' or 'without air-con'; the latter is often significantly cheaper and usually less appealing. Outside of this major distinction, prices vary according to whether there is a TV and/or an attached bathroom. It's rarely necessary to book rooms in advance. Note that in the bigger cities it's often easy to negotiate room discounts of up to 50% on the better-class hotels. In this guide, rates are generally broken down into budget (under Tk 500 for a double), midrange (Tk 500 to Tk 1000) and top end (over Tk 1000).

Government Rest Houses & Circuit Houses

There are government rest houses and circuit houses in every district. They aren't officially accessible to travellers, but the district commissioner may let you stay if there are few alternative options around.

The Archaeology Department has rest houses at Paharpur, Mainimati and Mahasthan. Rooms are basic but cheap at typically Tk 200 for a double.

Hotels

The word 'hotel' denotes a hotel or restaurant; the correct term for a hotel is 'residential hotel'. Lower-end establishments often make

this distinction on their signs, and you'll avoid confusion if you use this term when asking for directions.

Many hotels don't have English signs and some buildings look like hotels but aren't. You'll save yourself time and trouble if you learn to recognise the word 'hotel' in Bengali script (see p191).

Absolute bottom-end accommodation usually consists of a tiny room with fan, shared bathroom and maybe mosquito nets. This typically costs around Tk 80/120 for a single/double. Apart from space and hygiene deficiencies, these places often refuse to accept foreigners.

Midrange hotels are better value and there is an increasing number of them. Expect to pay from Tk 400/600 (or more in Dhaka) for a single/double with attached bathroom. For this you will usually get a small room with a reasonably soft bed, and a clean bathroom with a cold shower. Double this price and you're into the upper midrange or lower top-end class of hotel and can expect a large room, soft beds without too many nasty stains, hot water and sit-down toilets.

ACTIVITIES

Cycling

Bangladesh's lazy terrain makes it an ideal place for cycling. Even the slightly more hilly areas aren't arduous, they're just scenic. Good places for cycling include Srimangal (p154) in Sylhet division and Thakurgaon in Rajshahi division.

For information about cycling in general, see p173.

Hiking

The best places to do some hiking are forest reserves and national parks. Some, like Satchari National Park (p156) and Lowacherra National Park (p154) in Sylhet division, have hiking trails marked out and offer magical jungle experiences.

Unquestionably the best place for fully fledged hikes is the Chittagong Hill Tracts (p129), particularly around Bandarban. For the moment at least, the security situation prevents anything much more taxing than gentle day hikes, but a little determination and preplanning might open up multiday sensory-overload treks. The Adivasis (tribal people) in this area are considerably more hospitable than the central government likes

to give them credit for, and the landscape in which they live is unforgettable.

River Trips

To come to Bangladesh and not travel by boat down a swampy river is like going to Paris and not suffering from a look of utter disdain from a snooty waiter. It's not just inconceivable – it's plain old wrong! Although river trips in Bangladesh are unavoidable if you're doing any sort of extensive travel, it's also worth putting in the effort to do a good one. There are some river trips you can do around Dhaka either independently or through an organised tour company. See p59 for details.

The ultimate boat ride in Bangladesh is a journey on the Rocket. This crazy ferry ride between Dhaka and Khulna via Barisal isn't for the light-hearted but it's the stuff that legendary travel stories are made of. See p175 for more details.

Surfing

It's not Hawaii but for the most adventurous of wave riders surprisingly consistent beach breaks can be found between Cox's Bazar and St Martin's Island. The most consistent time of year is during the monsoon, but you'll need to rise early to beat the daily onshore winds. The best overall time is late September/early October when swells will be consistent, wind patterns more favourable and temperatures pleasant. Almost no foreigners have surfed in Bangladesh but you might be surprised to learn that there is a small Bangladeshi surf community around Cox's Bazar who even hold a fun contest in late October, which includes a Bangladeshi women's division – this country never fails to surprise! For more on Bangladeshi surfing, keep an eye on www.oceansurfpublications.co.uk.

BUSINESS HOURS

Unlike in most South Asian countries, business hours are strictly adhered to in Bangladesh and you shouldn't expect to get anything done on Friday, which is the official day off. Banking hours from Saturday to Wednesday are 9am to 3pm, and on Thursday 9am until 2pm. Select ATMs, like those attached to Standard Chartered Bank, Dutch-Bangla Bank or the less common HSBC, are open 24 hours or at least until very late.

Government offices are open Saturday to Thursday from 9am until 2pm. Private busi-

nesses generally operate between 9am and 5pm (closed Friday), while shops, including bazars, tend to be open from 9am or 10am to 8pm or 10pm. Some shops and bazars are open for half a day on Friday.

CHILDREN

Travelling with young children in Bangladesh would be very tough and child-care facilities are almost zero. However, Bangladeshis are fascinated by foreign children and everyone will go out of their way to help. You will have a constant queue of would-be nannies wanting to take your child under their wing.

From a health standpoint, dishes of boiled rice and unspiced *dahl* (yellow lentils), scrambled or boiled eggs, oatmeal and a variety of fruits and vegetables should be enough to keep kids happy.

You'll be hard pressed coming across high-chairs and nappy-changing facilities, but formula and disposable nappies can be found at some supermarkets in towns and cities.

Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* is a collection of experiences from travelling families, and includes practical advice on how to avoid hassles and have a fun travel experience with kids.

CLIMATE CHARTS

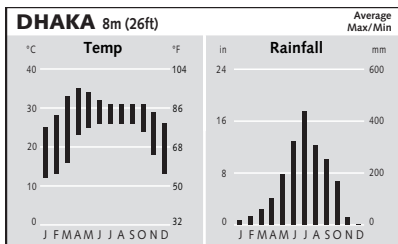
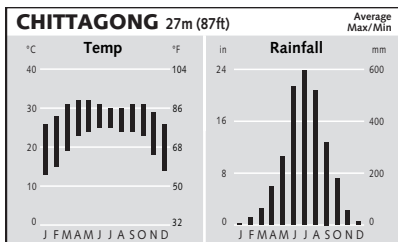
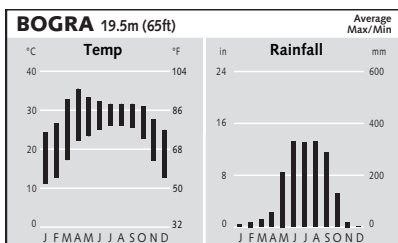
The climate in Bangladesh is dramatic, to say the least. It is subtropical and tropical with temperatures ranging from as low as 3°C overnight in the cold season to a daytime top of above 40°C in the hot season. Annual rainfall varies from 1000mm in the west to 2500mm in the southeast, and up to 5000mm in the north, near the hills of Assam.

Three-quarters of the annual rainfall occurs between June and September. The 90% to 95% humidity in this season is almost unbearable.

In the cold season the weather is drier and fresh, with average daytime temperatures of 24°C. Rainfall is negligible, although even in winter a brief shower may come along.

While early March can still be pleasant, by April, as the monsoon approaches, humidity increases and lethal hailstorms aren't uncommon. The monsoon season usually starts between late May and mid-June. It doesn't rain solidly all day – there tends to be an initial downpour, followed by clear skies. You should avoid visiting at this time of year!

See also When to Go (p12).



COURSES

The best places for learning Bengali are the **Effective Bangla Learning Centre** (EBLC; Map p62; ☎ 1710 926392; www.eblcbd.com; House 16A, Rd 25A, Banani, Dhaka) and **HEED** (Health, Education, Economic Development; Map p62; ☎ 881 2390, 989 6028; hlc@agni.com; House 104, Rd 12, Block E, Banani, Dhaka).

CUSTOMS

The usual '200 cigarettes, 1L of alcohol' rule applies, though a relatively casual approach is employed at border crossings. Foreigners are permitted to bring in US\$5000 without declaring it and Bangladeshis can bring in US\$2500.

On departure, tourists are allowed to reconvert 25% of the total foreign currency encashed in the country. This is only possible at the airport in Dhaka, and you will need to have your encashment slips with you as proof.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Bangladesh generally receives a rough ride in the Western press and many people regard it as a dangerously unstable country. The truth couldn't be further away from this and by and large Bangladesh is overwhelmingly friendly and hospitable. The biggest annoyance you will probably have to face is unabating friendliness – interested crowds are everywhere and questions about your nationality, religion and marital status never cease.

Having said that, there are some very rare but very real dangers in Bangladesh; foreigners have been robbed, raped and kidnapped.

Pickpocketing on crowded buses is not as endemic as in some other Asian countries, but armed robbery on buses, particularly at night and using crude weapons such as knives, acid bulbs and home-made shotguns, does take place. Try to travel in daylight hours only. A number of foreigners have been mugged, often at gunpoint, in the Gulshan area of Dhaka – be careful after dark. There have also been reports of theft committed by both touts and officials at both Dhaka and Sylhet airports. Keep a very close eye on your passport and other papers here. Rickshaws and taxis present all manner of theft and mugging opportunities, and women especially should be extremely careful of any taxi containing a driver and his 'friend'.

We have had some rare reports of harassment of foreigners in the form of pushing, stone throwing and spitting, but such incidents are very uncommon.

There are also ripples of terrorist activity, targeted assassinations, politically motivated attacks and, sometimes, violent religious rivalry. The latest attack at the time of writing was in May 2007, when bombs exploded at train stations in Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong though there were no fatalities. There have been a number of similar attacks in recent years that have seen four people killed. However, between late November and early December 2005 a number of bomb attacks took place across the country that left 23 people dead and 144 injured. Foreigners have never been targeted in these incidents, but many travel advisories warn foreign nationals to stay away from large gatherings to cut down on the 'wrong place, wrong time' possibility.

Foreigners are more likely to get tangled up in a hartal (strike). These frequently turn violent and many people have been killed or

seriously injured as a result. The National Day of Mourning (21 February) is a potentially chaotic day (see opposite). Major riots, affecting many towns, took place in August 2007 resulting in deaths and many injuries. A curfew was enforced in many problem areas including Dhaka. This has since been lifted but at the time of writing a state of emergency, originally imposed in January 2007, was still being enforced (see p24 for more information). However, it has to be said that this will have no effect on your travel plans and most foreigners aren't even aware of it.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (p129) is the only part of the country where you need really worry for your safety, and even here the problem areas are out of bounds to foreign tourists.

To sum up, the military-backed caretaker government has done much to ease tensions in Bangladesh and improve both the security and corruption situation, and in all honesty the biggest danger you face is from being involved in a road accident. Even so, it pays to keep yourself informed as to what's going on by regularly consulting travel advisories and newspapers.

Also see Dangers & Annoyances in the Dhaka chapter (p50).

Scams

Tourism has not really established itself in Bangladesh, and neither have tourist-related scams. You might actually be surprised at the sheer honesty of most people. However, as with anywhere in the world, not everyone is a good guy.

The most common scam you will encounter is short-changing for small transactions. The best guard against this is vigilance when you're receiving change, or a polite query about unlikely restaurant bills. A similar scam is bus boys conveniently 'forgetting' to give you your change, even though they have a fistful of taka. Nine times out of 10 you're more likely to be chased because *you've* forgotten, but keep this at the back of your mind.

Some travellers have reported being approached by dubious charities, initially appearing legitimate. Some professional beggars wave fraudulent or at least out-of-date pharmaceutical prescriptions asking for assistance in purchasing medicine for children.

Finally, there are the usual hassles with rickshaw, baby taxi (mini three-wheeled autorickshaws) and taxi drivers, though even here

the level of harassment is minimal compared to some nearby countries, and in many towns it's possible to just hop on a rickshaw without pre-negotiating a price and not suffer the consequences!

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Embassies & Consulates in Bangladesh

If you are going to spend a considerable length of time in a remote area, it is a good idea to register with your embassy.

Australia (Map p62; ☎ 881 3101-5; fax 811 125; 184 Gulshan Ave, Gulshan II, Dhaka)

Bhutan (Map p62; ☎ 882 6863; fax 882 3939; House 12, Rd 107, Gulshan II, Dhaka)

Canada (Map p62; ☎ 988 7091-7; fax 882 3043; House 16/A, Rd 48, Gulshan II, Dhaka)

China (Map p62; ☎ 882 4862; fax 882 3004; House 2 & 4, Rd 3, Block 1, Baridhara, Dhaka)

Denmark (Map p62; ☎ 882 1799; fax 882 3638; House 1, Rd 51, Gulshan, Dhaka)

France (Map p62; ☎ 881 3811-4; fax 882 3612; House 18, Rd 108, Gulshan, Dhaka)

Germany (Map p62; ☎ 882 3521-5; fax 885 3528; 178 Gulshan Ave, Gulshan II, Dhaka)

India (Map p62; ☎ 988 8789; fax 984 3050; House 2, Rd 142, Gulshan I, Dhaka)

Italy (Map p62; ☎ 882 2781-3; fax 882 2578; Plot 2/3, cnr Rds 74 & 79, Gulshan II, Dhaka)

Japan (Map p62; ☎ 881 0087; fax 882 4469; Plot 5 & 7, Dutabash Rd, Baridhara, Dhaka)

Malaysia (Map p62; ☎ 882 7759-60; fax 882 7761; Plot 1, cnr of United Nations Rd & Rd 6, Baridhara, Dhaka)

Myanmar (Burma; Map p62; ☎ 989 6331; fax 882 3740; House 3, Rd 84, Gulshan II, Dhaka)

Nepal (Map p62; ☎ 989 2490; fax 882 6401; cnr United Nations Rd & Rd 2, Baridhara, Dhaka)

Netherlands (Map p62; ☎ 882 2715-8; fax 882 3362; House 49, Rd 90, Gulshan II, Dhaka)

Norway (Map p62; ☎ 882 3880; fax 882 3661; House 9, Rd 111, Gulshan, Dhaka)

Pakistan (Map p62; ☎ 882 5388-9; fax 885 0637; House 2, Rd 71, Gulshan, Dhaka)

Russia (Map p62; ☎ 882 8142; fax 882 3735; House 9, Rd 79, Gulshan, Dhaka)

Sweden (Map p62; ☎ 883 3144-7; fax 882 3948; House 1, Rd 51, Gulshan II, Dhaka)

Switzerland (Map p62; ☎ 881 2874-6; fax 882 3872; House 31/B, Rd 18, Banani, Dhaka)

Thailand (Map p62; ☎ 881 2795-6; fax 885 4280; 18-20 Madani Ave, Baridhara, Dhaka)

UK (Map p62; ☎ 882 2705-9; fax 882 3666; 13 United Nations Rd at Dutabash Rd, Baridhara, Dhaka)

US (Map p62; ☎ 885 5500; fax 882 3159; Madani Ave, Baridhara, Dhaka)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

A festival in Bangladesh is usually called a mela. Although it's normally specific to just one religion, Bangladeshi curiosity is such that it's a given that everyone else in a town or village will rock up as well. Festivals may also be related to harvests as well as Hindu and Buddhist ceremonies. Minor melas are mainly related to weddings, exhibition fairs or even election victories.

The main nonreligious Bangladeshi holidays are:

February

National Mourning Day (21 February) A solemn occasion in remembrance of those killed on this day in 1952 in protests to establish Bengali as an official language of East Pakistan. Unesco have declared this day International Mother Language Day.

April

Honey-Hunting Festival (1 April) The honey-collecting season officially begins with much pomp at Burigoalini on the edge of the Sundarbans (p94).

Pohela Baishak (14 & 15 April) The Bangladeshi New Year celebration is the biggest festival in Bangladesh with large parades and many cultural events exploding in marvellous technicolour across the nation. Dhaka and Rangamati host the biggest events.

May

Rabindra & Nazrul Jayanti (11 & 25 May) The anniversaries of the birth of national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam on May 11 and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore on May 25 are celebrated with public readings and songs.

Islamic Festivals

Muslim holidays, known as Eids, follow a lunar calendar. The dates depend on the phases of the moon, and fall about 11 days earlier each successive year. The following festival calendar is based on festival dates between the years 2008 and 2011. Along with public holidays, these events are observed nationally, with government offices, banks and most businesses closing. They tend to lack the street flair of Hindu holidays.

February–March

Eid-e-Miladunnabi Birth of the Prophet Mohammed.

July–August

Shab-e-Barat This holiday marks the sighting of the full moon 14 days before the start of Ramadan. The night of *barat* (record), according to Mohammed, is the time that

BISWA IJTEMA

Every January up to three million Muslims from across the world descend on the Dhaka suburb of Tongi for the world's second-largest Muslim gathering (after the haj to Mecca in Saudi Arabia). The three-day event, which has been running since the 1940s, concentrates on prayers and meditation and is not a forum for political debate. Non-Muslim foreigners are normally well received.

God registers all the actions men are to perform in the ensuing year. It is a sacred night when alms and sweets are distributed to the poor.

Jamat-ul-Wida Start of the month of Ramadan and the fasting period.

Ramadan Referred to as Ramzan in Bangladesh. Fasting, the third pillar of Islam, incurs merit whenever observed, but is an absolute duty during Ramzan. For the entire month, between sunrise and sunset, abstinence from food, liquids, smoking, impure thoughts and physical pleasures is obligatory. Fasting begins at dawn and is broken when the evening call to prayer is heard. The *iftar* (meal) taken when the fast is broken includes samosa (a pastry triangle stuffed with spiced vegetables or minced meat), *piju* (deep-fried lentil-and-onion balls), various kebabs, and *moori* (aniseed) and *cheera* (flattened rice) preparations. Travellers, the elderly, the sick and the very young are pardoned from fasting during Ramzan (though they are supposed to make up for it at a later date). The fast is not observed as rigorously in Bangladesh as in some Middle Eastern countries, and some snack shops in the larger cities will stay open during the day but put up curtains so diners have a little anonymity. In smaller villages it may be more difficult to find a meal during the day. Travelling at this time can be very hard, if not impossible.

September–October

Eid-ul-Fitr One of the two major Muslim holidays, it celebrates the end of Ramzan with the sighting of the new moon. It's a holiday as important to Muslims as Christmas is to many Westerners. The festival is characterised by alms-giving and prayer, feasting, merriment and gifts. Eid Mubarrak or Happy Eid are the common greetings.

November–January

Eid-ul-Adha Known as the Eid of Sacrifice or, informally, Bloody Eid, this two-day festival falls 69 days after Eid-ul-Fitr. It remembers Abraham's sacrifice of his son Ishmael, celebrated with the slaughter of a cow, sheep or goat. After the morning prayers the head of the family takes the animal out to the entrance of the house, faces it toward

Mecca and kills it with a quick slash of the throat. The meat is divided among the poor, friends and family. During the week preceding the festival, open-air fairs do a brisk trade in cattle and goats. The animals are brightly adorned with ribbons, garlands and tassels. This festival also marks the beginning of the hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca.

Ashura The Ashura festival (also called Muharram) takes place in the Muslim month of Muharram. It commemorates the martyrdom of Hussain, grandson of the prophet Mohammed, on the battlefield of Kerbala in modern-day Iraq in the Christian year 680.

Hindu Festivals

Hindu holidays generally fall at much the same date each year. They usually mark the changing of the seasons.

January–February

Saraswati Puja Towards the end of January clay statues of Brahma's consort Saraswati are made in preparation for this ceremony, held around the beginning of February. The goddess of knowledge is always depicted playing a *veena* (an Indian stringed instrument) and accompanied by a swan, but outside these limitations there's a lot of variety.

February–March

Holi The Festival of Colours is celebrated in late February/early March. Commonly known as the spring festival, it is celebrated, less so here than in other countries, with the throwing of coloured water and powders and the construction of bonfires.

June–July

Rath Jatra This festival celebrates Jagannath, the lord of the world and a form of Krishna, along with his brother and sister. These three images are set upon a Jagannath (chariot) and pulled through the streets by devotees. The 7m chariot in Dhamrai, 32km northwest of Dhaka, is typical.

October

Durga Puja The most important Hindu festival celebrated in Bangladesh. Statues of the goddess Durga astride a lion, with her 10 hands holding 10 different weapons, are placed in every Hindu temple. Celebrations culminate on the day of the full moon when the statue is carried into the water after sunset. A huge festival takes place along the Buriganga River in Dhaka (see also p59).

For a list of other holidays see opposite.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

There is a high degree of sexual repression (and frustration) in Bangladesh. Authorities generally deny the existence of homosexuality and the criminal code left by the British Raj

punishes male homosexual acts with deportation, fines and/or prison, but these laws are hardly ever used. Lesbianism is studiously denied by the legal system.

Unofficially, many believe homosexuality is quite prevalent. Bangladeshi society can be privately tolerant towards homosexuality among young men, but only if it is a 'phase' that doesn't interfere with marriage prospects. Lesbians have to stay even deeper in the closet.

The great irony is that in a country where it is largely inappropriate for men and women to shake hands, it is socially acceptable for two men to hold hands. Such public displays of affection between men are common but don't signify a nonplatonic relationship.

Gay travellers are wise to be discreet in Bangladesh. The upside is that you will be spared the hassles that many unmarried heterosexual couples have in checking into hotels, given the assumption that you are just friends.

HOLIDAYS

Public Holidays

The following holidays are observed nationally, and government offices, banks and most businesses are closed.

Birthday of the Father of the Nation (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's birthday) 17 March

Independence Day 26 March

May Day 1 May

Bank Holiday 30 June

National Mourning Day (Anniversary of the death of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) 15 August

National Revolution Day 7 November

Biganj Dibash (Victory Day) 16 December

Christmas Day 25 December. Known as Bara Din (Big Day). Churches are adorned with lights and some hold cultural evenings with dances and prayers.

Bank Holiday 31 December

INSURANCE

Any policy you get should cover medical expenses and an emergency flight home. Always check the fine print. Some policies exclude coverage of 'dangerous activities', which can include motorcycling and trekking.

For theft and loss you will require documentation from the Bangladeshi police; getting it can be a hassle and often requires a 'fee'.

Worldwide travel insurance is available at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services. You

can buy, extend and claim online any time – even if you're already on the road.

See also p182 for health insurance details.

INTERNET ACCESS

Many top-end hotels provide universal power adaptors in rooms, but outside of those rare cases you'll need to bring your own. If you are travelling with a laptop or some other electronic device, remember to bring a 220V, 50 Hz AC adaptor. If you forget to bring one, you may be able to track one down in Dhaka. The Stadium Market would be a good bet.

Connections in top-range hotels are normally good but certainly won't be cheap. Thankfully, internet cafés are everywhere in Bangladesh – even small towns are getting tech-savvy. They are usually cheap and open till quite late. The lowest price is around Tk 20 per hour and the average is Tk 30 to Tk 45; connections are normally reasonable.

LEGAL MATTERS

Drug offences are taken seriously in Bangladesh and can result in the death penalty if considerable quantities are seized. Anyone, including foreigners, caught smuggling virtually any amount of drugs or gold often ends up with a prison sentence for life. As a matter of practice, courts permit those charged to have access to a lawyer.

Under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, to which Bangladesh is a signatory, any foreign national under detention has a right to request that their embassy be notified of their situation.

MAPS

The best map publisher, **Mappa** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 881 6710; www.themappa.com; 112 Green Rd, Farmgate) produces English-language maps, which are updated regularly. All are available at bookshops and New Market in Dhaka (Map pp56-7), and on occasion from street vendors.

The Parjatan Corporation also produces a Dhaka city map and a Bangladesh map. Though not as detailed as the professionally produced maps, they can be useful references. These are available at the **Parjatan Tourist Office** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 914 0790, 811 7855-9; 233 Airport Rd, Tejgaon) and occasionally at Parjatan Hotels.

MONEY

The local currency of Bangladesh is the taka (Tk; rhymes with Dhaka), which is further

divided into 100 paisas. There are 10, 20 and 50 paisa, and Tk 1, Tk 2 and Tk 5 coins. There are notes in denominations of Tk 1, Tk 2, Tk 5, Tk 10, Tk 20, Tk 50, Tk 100 and Tk 500.

Torn notes may be refused by merchants. Most banks will exchange them for you.

Bangladesh is a long way behind much of the world when it comes to banking and exchanging money. Most banks outside the big cities won't exchange money in whatever form you present it – even dollar or euro cash receives wide-eyed stares of bewilderment. It's best to change as much money as you are likely to need in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet. You might get lucky elsewhere, but many travellers find themselves getting caught short when no bank for miles around will exchange money or travellers cheques for them and every ATM spits out their card in disgust!

For information on costs, see p12, and for exchange rates see Quick Reference on the inside front cover.

ATMs

Major towns and cities have ATMs, and there appear to be more on the way. However, the vast majority don't accept foreign bank or credit cards. The most reliable are those belonging to Standard Chartered Bank, Dutch-Bangla Bank and HSBC, and with any of these three you shouldn't have any problems with a Visa card, but Cirrus or MasterCard might present problems. Unfortunately, these machines are only found in the biggest towns and cities (indicated in regional chapters). ATMs are usually open-all-hours guarded booths.

Cash

It is a good idea to bring US dollars with you to change into local currency when you can't change travellers cheques or use a credit card. US dollars are the preferred currency, with euros running a very distant second. Again, only banks like Standard Chartered and HSBC in the biggest centres are likely to change cash for you.

At some banks you may have to show your passport even when changing cash.

Credit Cards

Visa, MasterCard and American Express are usually accepted by major hotels and restaurants in Dhaka and Chittagong.

Cash advances on credit cards can be made at Standard Chartered and HSBC banks. HSBC ATMs do not accept Cirrus cards.

Moneychangers

There are a few authorised moneychangers that legally convert cash on the spot at good rates. They're open all hours and can convert taka into US dollars as well. If it looks like a well-run establishment, chances are it is.

With the liberalisation of the economy, there is essentially no black market.

Tippling

Baksheesh (*bokh-sheesh*), in the sense of a tip or gift rather than a bribe (an admittedly fine line), is part of life in Bangladesh. Don't see it as begging; it's part of Islamic morality that rich people give some of their income to those less fortunate. There are some peculiarities to this system though; if you're going to be repeatedly using a service, an initial tip ensures that decent standards will be kept up.

Don't feel persecuted – well-to-do locals also have to pay baksheesh. Always be conscious of the expectations that will be placed on the next foreigner in light of the amount you give and don't feel embarrassed about not giving baksheesh to someone who rendered absolutely no service at all.

In expensive restaurants in Dhaka that are mostly frequented by foreigners, waiters often expect a small tip, typically about 5%. In any other type of restaurant it is not necessary to tip.

Travellers Cheques

Put simply, don't bother! Only the biggest international banks are likely to accept them and even then it will be with great reluctance.

POST

Bangladesh's postal system works well. You may be sceptical when you're watching an old man weigh your letter on a set of scales that should be in an antique shop, but rest assured it will get sent and arrive in around 10 to 15 days.

If you've overdone the shopping, consider mailing stuff home to yourself – it's amazingly cheap.

Receiving mail can be more frustrating. The post restante service in Dhaka is at the main post office (Map pp56–7). It's probably safer

to try and get mail sent to a personal address or your company office.

SHOPPING

You don't get hassled to buy things here, mainly because there isn't very much produced with the tourist market in mind. Even quality postcards are hard to come by.

Things not to buy are products made from wild animals, reptiles, seashells and coral, all of which are under pressure to survive in this crowded country. There is also a trade in the country's artistic treasures, which are often plundered from Hindu temples.

Handicrafts

Souvenirs include jewellery, garments, brasswork, leatherwork, ceramics, jute products, artwork, woodcarvings and clay or metal sculptural work. Unique items include *jam-dani* (loom-embroidered muslin or silk) saris, jute doormats, wall pieces, glass bangles and reed mats. Quality is generally high and the prices generally low.

Jute carpets, if you have the room, are a real deal. The better ones are similar to Oriental wool carpets. They don't last as long as the real thing, but a 2m-by-3m (6ft-by-9ft) jute carpet costing US\$50 (and a fortune in excess baggage) will last five or more years.

The chain of Aarong shops has a range of high-quality goods, although the fixed prices are higher than in the markets, where it's normal to bargain prices down.

Clothing

You may decide to replace everything in your backpack. The Bangladeshi garment industry is one of the biggest producers of Western clothing, and you can either purchase it from some of the high-street fashion-label stores around Gulshan or buy much cheaper seconds and overruns at the enormous Banga Bazar (Map p51), sometimes referred to as Gulistan Hawker's Market. There's also a good range at New Market (Map pp56-7). See p65 for more information.

Rickshaw Art

One distinctly Bangladeshi souvenir is a piece of authentic rickshaw art. These colourful back flaps of rickshaws are lightweight and easy to pack in the flat of your bag or backpack. Rickshaw art is not a tourist industry, so you'll have to shop where the rickshaw-

wallahs shop. The few centrally located shops are on Bicycle St in Dhaka, a local name for the area where most bicycle parts and a few whole bicycles are sold. See p54 and the box text on p34 for more information.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Those who are travelling alone on the assumption that they will meet other travellers on the road should think again. You may, but you'll probably be able to count them on one hand. To increase your chances, the best thing to do is join a short tour (to the Sundarbans would be perfect) to suss out candidates.

Travelling alone through Bangladesh can be a rewarding experience, and won't cost you much more money than travelling with company – basic single rooms are often less than half the cost of a double. Then again, it may be worthwhile splashing out on a cabin or sleeper on a boat or train for peace of mind. On your own you will have to stay particularly alert, and exercise a greater degree of caution with regards to where you go and when.

TELEPHONE

Though there are a surprising number of mobile phones floating around Bangladesh, some towns still don't have land lines. Don't expect that every hotel and restaurant will have a phone number.

International calls are easy to make. Many phones have direct-dial service via satellite. Rates are 25% lower all day on Friday and on other days from 11pm to 8am. Local calls present no problems, but between cities it is often difficult to hear the other end. The only way to make a 'public' phone call is to use the telephone and fax services available at numerous small business centres. Charges are roughly Tk 100/110/120 per minute to Australia/Europe/USA, ie roughly double the actual rate. Major hotels charge two or three times as much. The numbers for long-distance information are ☎ 103 (domestic) and ☎ 162 (international). International operators speak English; others usually don't.

Mobile Phones

If bringing your own phone, make sure your service provider has turned on the global-roaming facility on your phone and be prepared to remortgage your house to pay the bill when you get back home! Note that you may have to manually find a Bangladeshi

network on your own phone. Reception is normally decent.

Phone Codes

To call a number in Bangladesh from outside the country, dial country code ☎ 880, followed by the city or mobile code without the leading 0, and then the number.

To call a different city from within Bangladesh, dial the city code including the leading zero, followed by the number.

To call another country from Bangladesh, dial ☎ 00 followed by the country code and city code.

City codes can be found in phone books and, for major cities, in this guide under the city headings in each regional chapter.

Phonecards

There is an increasing number of phonecards appearing on the market, which can be bought at some small business centres and phone shops in large cities. Shop around for the best deal for the country you'll be calling most.

TIME

Bangladesh has one time zone: an hour behind Thailand, half an hour ahead of India, six hours ahead of GMT, 10 hours ahead of New York (11 during daylight savings time), four hours behind EST in Australia and five hours ahead of France.

TOILETS

In midrange and top-end establishments you'll find sit-down toilets that flush, but most toilets are mildly malodorous squat types. Sit-down toilets are sometimes described as 'high commode' and squat toilets as 'Indian style'.

The ritual in squat toilets is to use your left hand and water. A strategically placed tap and jug are usually at hand. If you can't master the local method or don't even want to try, toilet paper is widely available. Sometimes a basket is provided where paper and tampons can be discarded.

Some women report that when trying to use toilets in cheap restaurants, they've been told the facilities are unsuitable. Polite protestations that they're more suitable than the floor may help.

There are very few facilities at bus stations and other public places, and what facilities exist, are pretty horrific. It pays to do your thing back at your hotel. By and large you

will find that Bangladeshi hospitality extends to letting you use a toilet, if you ask nicely enough, or you could simply buy a drink at a nice hotel for an excuse to sit down (pun absolutely intended).

In rural areas it can be difficult to find both toilets and privacy. For women in a desperate situation, a long skirt will make this awkward position a little less so.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The national tourist office is the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation. It has more of a presence in terms of nationwide hotels than nationwide information. It also theoretically runs tours, but private-sector operators have eclipsed its tour service. Outside of the **Parjatan main office** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 914 0790, 811 7855-9; www.bangladesh tourism.gov.bd; 233 Airport Rd, Tejgaon), information counters at Parjatan hotels have little to offer but brochures, though they are often the nicest place to stay in town.

Parjatan hotels can be found in Benapole, Bogra, Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Kuakata, Madhabkunda, Mongla, Rangamati, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Teknaf and Tungipara.

The Parjatan website is useful. For other useful tourist-oriented internet resources see p14.

In general, it's better to consult a private tour company for anything other than the most basic tourist-related questions. Special mention must also be made here to **Mahmud Hasan Khan** (☎ 0171 4044498; mahmud.bangladesh@gmail.com; www.mahmud.bigbig.com) and his brother **Mahfuz Hossain Khan** (☎ 0171 1048456; mahfuz1972@gmail.com). Mahmud is essentially the guardian angel of travellers in Bangladesh and can be found dispensing invaluable advice on the Thorn Tree forum of lonelyplanet.com. Neither brother officially works in the tourist industry, though if they can wrangle time off their day jobs, they will be happy to accompany you as a guide for a fee. Instead in the classic manner of all Bangladeshis, they do it only as a hobby to ensure that tourists leave Bangladesh with good impressions.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Putting it bluntly, disabled travellers will struggle in Bangladesh. Some footpaths are difficult for even the able-bodied to traverse. In fact, with its squat toilets, over-crowded buses and absence of elevators in all but the

finest buildings in Dhaka, it would seem that the country has contrived to keep out everyone except the most fit and able.

On the other hand, hiring help to check out accessible hotels and restaurants, toilets and other facilities and to help you get around is going to be quite cheap. Also, Bangladeshis are good at coming to the aid of foreigners before they are even asked.

VISAS

With some obscure exceptions, visas are required for citizens of all countries. Israeli passport holders are forbidden from entering Bangladesh.

Visas on arrival (either by air or land) have not been available for some years, but in March 2008, 15-day landing permits started to be issued again in exceptional circumstances. The immigration department doesn't encourage tourists to arrive without a visa and there is no guarantee you will be granted entry (especially if you have just arrived from a country with a Bangladeshi embassy), but the word is that some people had managed to obtain them. For the moment, we recommend that you do all you can to obtain a visa in advance, but this is an encouraging sign that visa rules might be further relaxed.

Visa validity and the granted length of stay seems to vary from embassy to embassy, but normally you will be issued with a visa valid for two or three months from the date of issue, and good for stays of one to two months. Visa fees vary according to nationality, whether you are seeking single or multiple entry and which embassy you are applying through, but they normally cost around US\$50/£30/£25.

Requests for visas for stays longer than three months are usually denied. If you decide to extend your stay, extensions can be obtained, though this requires tangling with Bangladeshi bureaucracy and isn't a good idea (see below).

Visa Extensions & Change of Route Permits

To apply for visa extensions and change of route permits you will need to visit the **Immigration and Passport Office** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 889 750; Agargaon Rd, Dhaka; ☹ Sat-Thu). This is also the office where long-term visitors are required to register.

Travellers have reported poor service and misinformation at this office. You will need to be both persistent and patient.

If you overstay your visa, you will be fined for each extra day. In some cases travellers have been charged even more, given no receipt and the extra charge has not been explained.

Extensions up to a total stay of three months are generally easy to obtain. If you've been in Bangladesh for three months and wish to extend beyond that, the process can take up to a week or more, and there is no assurance that you'll receive an extension. The more convincing your reasons for wanting an extension, the better your chances of getting one.

Processing of requests to stay longer than three months is notoriously inefficient, so start the process early – at least a fortnight before the expiration date, if you've already been there three months.

If you exit Bangladesh by means other than that by which you entered (ie you flew in but are leaving by land), you will need a change of route permit, also sometimes referred to as a road permit. Change of route permits shouldn't take more than 24 hours, but sometimes take up to 72 so start the process early. The permit is free. You will need a couple of passport photos.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Bangladeshi opinions about Western women are still being formed. By and large the default response to the bewildering sight of you is respect, so don't do anything that would make you less than worthy of it. Bangladesh is safer than a lot of Muslim countries, but it's wise to be careful. How you carry yourself subtly determines how you are treated. A woman who is politely assertive can ask for space and usually gets it. The other side of the harassment coin, and almost as much of a nuisance, is that people are constantly making elaborate arrangements to protect you from harassment.

Dressing like a local is not obligatory but it will certainly impact on the way you are treated. You will still get attention, but the attention you get will be more respectful and appreciative of the fact that you have made the effort. Invest in a *salwar kameez* (a long dress-like tunic worn over baggy trousers). A *dupatta* (long scarf) to cover your head

increases the appearance of modesty and is a handy accessory. You can get away with wearing baggy trousers and a long loose-fitting shirt in most parts of the country. Long, loose skirts are also acceptable and provide the added advantage of a modicum of privacy in the absence of a public toilet. Make sure you wear a headscarf at places of worship. Most mosques don't allow women inside, although some have a special women's gallery. If in doubt, ask.

Keep in mind that in this society women are not touched by men, but because you're a foreigner, it might happen. A clear yet tactful objection should end the matter.

Tampons are available from some upmarket supermarkets (like Agora) for around Tk 60 a packet. Sanitary napkins and panty liners are widely available, but be sure to carry adequate supplies if you're travelling away from major cities.

A good place to take a breather from the patriarchal streets is Adda, an informal space for women to eat and chat, at Narigrantha Prabartana, the feminist bookshop run by Unnayan Bikalper Nitinirdharoni Gobeshona (UBINIG; Policy Research for Development Alternatives) in Dhaka. Men are welcome, so long as they are accompanied by a woman. See p49 for further details.

Eating

In a Bangladeshi middle-class home you would most likely be expected to eat first with the men while the women of the house-

hold tuck themselves away in another part of the house or dutifully serve the meal. In rural areas you might not eat with either, but be served first and separately, as a gesture of respect. Accept either graciously. Protest would cause great embarrassment on the part of your host.

In restaurants you may be shown to the curtained women's rooms. This is a courteous offer that you can decline, though you may find that the curtain provides something of a respite from the eyes that will be on you if you sit elsewhere.

Getting Around

On buses, unaccompanied women are expected to sit at the front. If you are travelling with 'your husband' you are expected to sit on the window side, away from the aisle. Avoid travelling alone at night; Bangladeshi women avoid going out alone at night as much as possible.

Sleeping

Women, with or without men, are sometimes unwelcome in budget hotels, usually because the manager thinks the hotel is not suitable. This knee-jerk reaction can sometimes be overcome if you hang around long enough. On the other hand, staying in one of these cheaper establishments, especially if you are going solo, can be more trouble than it is worth. Midrange hotels that are accustomed to foreigners are the best bet. Unmarried couples are better off simply saying they're married.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

To enter Bangladesh you will need a passport that's valid for at least six months beyond the duration of your stay, an onward/return ticket and a visa.

Rules and procedures for entering and exiting Bangladesh seem to be in a constant state of flux. For many years it hasn't been possible to obtain a visa on arrival at the airport, though there are rumours that some people had recently managed to wrangle visas on arrival. Despite this promising move, it's still best to play it safe and make sure you arrive with a visa and your passport in order. See p167 for more information.

If you are exiting by land but you entered by air, a 'change of route' permit is required (see p167). Note that Bangladesh currently refuses entry to Israeli passport holders.

AIR

Airports & Airlines

There are three international airports in Bangladesh. Osmani International (ZYL) in Sylhet, Patenga (CGP) in Chittagong and Zia International Airport (DAC) in Dhaka. **Zia International Airport** (☎ 02-819 4350) is the busiest of the three. Located 12km north of the city centre, on the road to Uttara, it doesn't have 'gateway to the world' written on it, but it

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

does have a bank, some duty-free shops and a couple of restaurants.

For a long time Bangladesh had only one major airline, Biman. The US Federal Aviation Administration has classified Biman as category two, which means that it is not in absolute compliance with international aviation safety standards. They run domestic flights between Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet, and internationally throughout South and Southeast Asia and occasionally even to Europe. Privately run GMG Airlines is a newer, brighter and better option. It links Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Cox's Bazaar, Barisal and Jessore, but internationally it only serves South and Southeast Asia. GMG has just been joined by United Airways, which runs an almost identical service, in equally good planes, as GMG. In 2007 two new airlines, funded by British and Bangladeshi businessmen, took to the skies. These are Best Air and Royal Bengal. At the time of writing it seemed that both were offering very limited internal services, and the much-hyped London–Bangladesh route seems to have quietly vanished from the advertising hype.

Airlines flying to and from Bangladesh:

Biman (BG; ☎ 02-956 0151; www.bimanair.com; hub Zia International Airport, Dhaka)

British Airways (BA; ☎ 02-881 5111; www.britishairways.com; hub Heathrow Airport, London)

Dragon Air (KA; ☎ 02-881 8782; www.dragonair.com; hub Hong Kong International Airport)

Druk Air (Bhutan Airlines; KB; ☎ 02-891 1066; www.drukair.com.bt; hub Paro Airport)

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motor travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening; two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow jetsetters to offset the greenhouse gases they are responsible for with contributions to energy-saving projects and other climate-friendly initiatives in the developing world – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, supports the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: lonelyplanet.com.

Emirates (EK; ☎ 02-989 2801; www.emirates.com; hub Dubai International Airport)

Etihad Airways (ETD; ☎ 02-883 1258; www.etihadairways.com; hub Abu Dhabi Airport)

GMG Airlines (Z5; ☎ 02-882 5845; www.gmgairlines.com; hub Zia International Airport, Dhaka)

Gulf Air (GF; ☎ 02-811 3237; www.gulfairco.com; hub Bahrain Airport)

Indian Airlines (IC; ☎ 02-955 5915; www.indian-airlines.nic.in; hub Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi)

Malaysia Airlines (MH; ☎ 02-988 8211; www.malaysiaairlines.com; hub Kuala Lumpur International Airport)

Pakistan International Airways (PK; ☎ 02-934 9293; www.piac.com.pk; hub Quaid-e-Azam International Airport, Karachi)

Qatar Airways (QR; ☎ 02-955 6491; www.qatarairways.com; hub Doha Airport)

Singapore Airlines (SQ; ☎ 02-881 1504; www.singaporeair.com; hub Changi Airport)

Thai International (TG; ☎ 02-813 4711-18; www.thaiair.com; hub Bangkok International Airport)

United Airways (☎ 02-893 2338; www.uabdl.com; hub Zia International Airport)

Tickets

Compared with India, fares to Bangladesh aren't very cheap and, if you don't mind the hassle of obtaining an Indian visa, a cheaper way of entering the country is often by coming overland from Kolkata (you'll need to

leave via this route as well). Buying a one-way ticket out of Bangladesh is very expensive – go to India first!

There are many good travel agents in Dhaka. Those listed in the Dhaka chapter accept payment by credit card or travellers cheques (see p50).

Asia

There are flights to/from all nearby Asian countries except Myanmar. Most connections are direct to Dhaka's Zia International Airport, except for Biman flights between Chittagong and India or Thailand. During hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca), airlines usually increase their services so that it is even possible to fly directly out of Sylhet.

BHUTAN

Druk Air offers the only service between Dhaka and Paro, and the fare is high (US\$190/380 one way/return). There are only two flights a week. If the schedule isn't convenient, you could fly to Paro via Kolkata, using Druk Air and Biman; connections are good and the cost is only marginally more.

INDIA

GMG has frequent daily flights between Dhaka and Kolkata and slightly less frequent

flights to Delhi. There are also connections between Chittagong and Kolkata several times a week.

From India expect to pay around US\$65/115 for a one-way/return flight from Kolkata or US\$235/470 from Delhi to Dhaka.

MYANMAR

To fly to Myanmar you will need to go via Thailand or India.

NEPAL

There are daily flights between Dhaka and Kathmandu with GMG. The flight takes 65 minutes and the one-way fare is around US\$110.

THAILAND

Thai Airlines, GMG and Druk Air fly from Bangkok to Dhaka. Thai Airlines has flights every day, as does GMG. Thai Airlines charges around US\$600 for a round-trip.

If you purchase your ticket from one of the many discount agencies in Bangkok, you'll get a much better deal.

Australia

The easiest way to get to Bangladesh from Australia is to fly to Bangkok, Singapore or Kuala Lumpur, then fly from there to Dhaka, or to fly to Kolkata in India, and fly or travel by land into Bangladesh. Flights from Sydney to Dhaka can be found for as little as A\$1000 whereas advance-purchase airfares from the east coast to Bangkok are from A\$900 return.

Quite a few travel offices specialise in discount air tickets. Some travel agents, particularly smaller ones, advertise cheap fares in the travel sections of weekend newspapers such as the *Age* in Melbourne and the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Reputable agents with branches throughout Australia:

Flight Centre Australia (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au)

STA Travel Australia (☎ 134 782; www.statravel.com.au)

Continental Europe

Though London is the travel-discount capital of Europe, there are several other cities where you can find a range of good deals. Generally there is not much variation in airfares for departures from the main European cities.

All the major airlines usually offer some sort of deal, and travel agents generally have a number of deals on offer, so shop around.

Good places to start:

Barceló Viajes (☎ 902 11 62 26; www.barceloviajes.com) In Spain.

CTS Viaggi (☎ 199 50 11 50; www.cts.it) In Italy.

NBBS Reizen (☎ 0180 39 33 77; www.nbbs.nl) In the Netherlands.

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 0 825 000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr) In France.

STA Travel (☎ 069 743 032 92; www.statravel.de) In Germany.

STA Travel (☎ 0900 450 402; www.statravel.ch) In Switzerland.

The best airlines serving Dhaka from Europe are British Airways and the Middle Eastern airlines (with a stopoff in their home country).

UK & Ireland

Airline-ticket discounters are known as 'bucket shops' in the UK. Despite the somewhat disreputable name, there is nothing under-the-counter about them. Discount air travel is big business in London. Advertisements for many travel agents appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheets, such as the *Independent* on Saturday, and the *Sunday Times*. Look out for the free magazines, such as *TNT*, that are widely available in London – start by looking outside the main railway and underground stations.

Good starting points:

STA Travel (☎ 0871 2 300 040; www.statravel.co.uk)

Trailfinders (☎ 0845 058 5858; www.trailfinders.co.uk)

USA

Discount travel agents in the USA are commonly known as 'consolidators' (although you won't see a sign on the door saying 'consolidator'). San Francisco is the consolidator capital of America, although some good deals can be found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities. Consolidators can be found through the *Yellow Pages* or the major daily newspapers. The *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *San Francisco Examiner* all produce weekly travel sections in which you will find travel-agency ads.

There are basically two ways to get to Bangladesh from the USA. From the west coast virtually everyone flies to Dhaka via Bangkok or Singapore. You can also fly direct to India and connect from there, but it will cost more.

From the east coast most people fly via Europe. Biman no longer operates direct flights to/from the USA, so you will have to transit somewhere en route.

One recommended travel agent is **STA Travel** (☎ 800-781 4040; www.statravel.com).

LAND Border Crossings

There are numerous points to cross into India, but only a few of these are set up with immigration facilities to service foreigners.

Theoretically the same system is supposed to be in place for all of these crossings, but in practice this isn't the case. There is a Tk 300 departure tax, officially at least, at all land border crossings, but some travellers have reported not having to pay this. This tax must be paid in advance at a Sonali Bank branch (either in Dhaka, another big city or at the closest branch to the border). There have also been reports of people managing to leave without a change of route permit, and others being turned back for not having one. A change of route permit is officially required if you have entered Bangladesh by air and leave via a land crossing. These can be obtained at the Immigration and Passport Office (p167). Customs are fairly lax with foreigners. The same rules regarding what you can bring into the country (in the way of cigarettes and alcohol) apply at border crossings as at airports, though in practice a blind eye is usually turned to your luggage at land crossings.

AKHAURA

This border is close to Dhaka, along Akhaura Rd, 4km west of Agartala in India. The border is open from 8am to 6pm daily.

Officials on both sides operate an unofficial money-changing service, which may be necessary for a small amount to get you to Akhaura, if you're coming into Bangladesh. The distance between Dhaka and Agartala (in India's Tripura state) is 155km.

In India it is cheap to fly from Kolkata to Agartala, from where a Bangladeshi visa can be issued.

Coming into Bangladesh you will find plenty of rickshaws heading to the town of Akhaura, 5km away.

BENAPOLE

Officials at this border seem to be particularly prone to request change of route per-

mits. Without one, you run a big risk of being turned back.

For more information on crossing this border, see p82.

In India **BRTC** (Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation; 21/A Mirza Ghalib St, Salt Lake City, Kolkata) runs direct services from Kolkata to Dhaka on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The privately run **Shyamoli Paribahan** (☎ 033-2252 0802; 6/1 Marquis St; ☎ 10am-5pm) operates a daily service to Dhaka with a change in Benapole (Rs 550 one way).

BURIMARI

Burimari is 13km northwest of the village of Patgram. It can be reached by direct bus from Dhaka or Rangpur.

For more information, see p113.

GODAGARI

To get to the Godagari border from Rajshahi, take a Nawabganj-bound bus. In the town of Godagari, the border is quite well marked.

The towns of Godagari and Lalgola are separated by the Padma River. In the dry season it is possible to walk across it, otherwise there will be boats waiting to take you across. In the town of Lalgola, on the Indian side, there is a train station. This crossing is surprisingly little used by foreign tourists.

HILI

Much trade between Bangladesh and India goes on via this border. The Indian town of Balurghat is 25km from Hili, on the state highway. The border can be seen from the side of the road – it's usually lined with hundreds of trucks. This crossing is little used by foreign tourists.

TAMABIL

The catch with crossing at this border is the need to present a receipt that shows you have deposited a travel tax of Tk 300 into a Sonali Bank. Travellers have been turned back because they have failed to do so.

For more information on crossing this border see p150.

Car

To drive in Bangladesh, you will need an International Driver's Licence. The import of a vehicle requires a *carnet de passage en douane* (a document from the motoring organisation in the country in which the

FROM MYANMAR (BURMA)

Overland routes between the subcontinent and Myanmar have been closed since the early 1950s. Even if the border were to be opened to foreigners in the future (it is periodically opened for Bangladeshis), roads across the frontier are in bad condition. When the 133km Bangladesh–Myanmar Friendship Bridge is completed (the foundation stone was laid in April 2004) things may change.

In the meantime it is not possible to cross from or into Myanmar. Given the forbidden-fruit fascination that off-limits border areas have for many travellers, some people have been tempted to make a discreet trek across the Bangladeshi border into Rakhaing (Arakan) state. While this may have been fun in the past, and the punishment not too severe, things are different now: Myanmar's army has planted minefields along the border.

vehicle is registered, which says you will not sell the vehicle abroad without paying import duties) and an entry permit from a Bangladeshi embassy.

Train

At the time of writing, an announcement was made that after around 50 years without a service, rail travel between Bangladesh and Kolkata was finally set to kick into life.

GETTING AROUND

There are three words that can be used to sum up Bangladeshi public transport. Cheap, uncomfortable and scary. If you so wished, you could travel straight across the country for little more than a few hundred taka using rickety old buses or squashed into a 2nd-class train carriage. However, the journey won't be pleasant, particularly in the cheaper seats on any form of Bangladeshi public transport. Travelling here can also be a scary experience. Buses are the worst offenders – the drivers show no regard whatsoever for the safety of their passengers or other road users, though the one saving grace is that most roads are fairly quiet, and if the bus does topple over it's only likely to drop into a paddy field rather than off the edge of a cliff. The Dhaka–Chittagong road and Dhaka–Bogra road are real death traps: take the train instead. Do all you can to avoid travelling anywhere by road at night.

The distinguishing feature of internal travel in Bangladesh is the presence of a well-developed and well-used system of water transport. Rivers and streams outstretch roads in total distance, making water

transport an essential of daily life. For the traveller, a long Bangladeshi ferry ride, especially on the smaller rivers where you can watch life along the banks, is one of the undisputed highlights of a trip to Bangladesh.

Nevertheless, travelling by boat is slow compared to travelling by bus and it's usually avoidable, so many travellers never go out of their way to take a long trip, settling instead for a short ferry ride across a river or two, but this really is a mistake.

AIR**Airlines in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh currently has five domestic airlines: Biman, GMG Airlines, United Airways, Royal Bengal and Best Air.

Biman's planes have done an awful lot of air miles and the interiors are a bit tattered, but the pilots are enormously experienced.

The other three are privately owned and are classier, safer and also win points for punctuality and service. United, Royal Bengal and Best Air are recent start ups and remain relatively untested so far.

GMG is probably the best airline to use but don't expect much reliability on routes. United is starting to receive positive reports.

Airlines mostly fly between Dhaka and regional cities; there are only a couple of direct flights between regional cities, including Cox's Bazar–Chittagong.

Prices are low (Dhaka–Sylhet is around Tk 3700), but do change frequently.

BICYCLE

Bangladesh is great for cycling and this is an interesting way to see the country. With the exception of the tea-estate regions in the Sylhet division, the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the road between Chittagong and Teknaf,

Bangladesh is perfectly flat – you can pedal around very easily with a single-gear bike.

Cities, particularly Dhaka and Chittagong, are not easy or safe places to ride, given manic traffic and pollution. If you leave early, say 5.30am, you should be able to get out of the city without incident. Alternatively, you can put your bike on the roof of a baby taxi (three-wheeled auto-rickshaw) or bus. Some travellers have reported not being allowed to take their bikes on board trains.

The trick to cycling in Bangladesh is to avoid major highways as much as possible; look for back streets that will get you to the same destination. Unfortunately, maps of Bangladesh aren't detailed enough to be of much use, so be prepared for some interesting though unintentional detours.

Most paths are bricked and in good condition, and even if it's just a dirt path, bikes will be able to pass during the dry season. A river won't hinder your travel, since there's invariably a boat of some sort to take you across. At major bridges a sympathetic truck driver is likely to pile both you and your bike in the back for the crossing.

The ideal time to go cycling is in the dry season from mid-October to late March; during the monsoon many tracks become impassable.

Though cycling can by and large be a relaxing way to explore Bangladesh, don't get complacent about your belongings; snatches from saddlebags are not unheard of.

It's best to bring your bicycle and all other gear with you, though bike repair shops, catering to all those cycle-rickshaws, are two-a-penny almost everywhere.

BOAT Ferry

The river is the traditional means of transport in a country that has 8000km of navigable rivers, though schedules, even for the ferries crossing the innumerable rivers, are prone to disruption. During the monsoon, rivers become very turbulent and flooding might mean relocation of ghats (landings); during the dry season, riverbeds choked with silt can make routes impassable. Winter fogs can cause long delays, and mechanical problems on the often poorly maintained boats are not unknown.

The main routes are covered by the Bangladesh Inland Waterway Transport Corporation (BIWTC), but there are many

private companies operating on shorter routes and some competing with the BIWTC on the main ones. Private boats tend to be slower and less comfortable but cheaper than BIWTC boats.

Bangladesh averages about five major ferry sinkings a year, frequently at night and with an average of 100 people drowning each time. Despite this very unenviable safety record, you should try to experience at least one ferry ride whilst in Bangladesh. The one that most people take is the Rocket between Dhaka and Khulna (opposite).

CLASSES

There are four classes of ticket on Bangladeshi boats: 1st, 2nd, inter and deck class. Deck class simply means a space on deck, for which you'll need to bring your own bedding, mattress, food and water. Inter stands for intermediate, and gives you a berth in a cabin with 10 to 16 wooden-slat bunks. In deck class you may find your ability to sleep in cramped, noisy spaces stretched to the limit. Bedding is provided only in 1st class. It's quite unusual for a foreigner to use either the intermediate or deck class.

On all craft with 1st-class tickets you must book in advance to be assured of a cabin. On popular routes, especially the Rocket route between Dhaka and Khulna, you may have to book a couple of weeks ahead during the dry season. If you're catching a boat at one of the smaller stops, your reservation for a 1st-class cabin will have to be telegraphed to another office, and may take some time. Inter- and deck-class tickets can be bought on board, so there's always a scramble for room.

If you haven't managed to book a 1st-class cabin, it's worth boarding anyway and buying a deck-class ticket, as you may be offered a crew member's cabin. Renting a crew cabin is common and accepted practice, but it's technically against the rules, so there's scope for rip-offs. Don't necessarily believe the crew member when they tell you that the fee you pay them is all that you will have to pay – you need to buy at least a deck-class ticket to get out of the ghat at the other end of the trip, and other hastily thought of hidden charges may crop up. Some travellers have even had these sorts of problems when renting the captain's cabin.

It's a hassle finding the ship assistant, but if you want to avoid the possibility of minor

rip-offs, involve him in negotiations for a crew cabin. He is responsible for matters relating to passengers and accommodation.

If you travel deck or inter class (and having a crew berth counts as deck class), you can't use the pleasant 1st-class deck, from where the best views are to be had. You might of course be able to sneak in, but don't complain too loudly if you're thrown out.

Prices in this book are generally for 1st/2nd/deck class.

TIPS

In winter, thick fog can turn a 12-hour trip into a 24-hour one, although the captain sometimes doesn't decide that it's unsafe to proceed until he has a very close encounter with a riverbank. If you're travelling deck class, make sure that you're sleeping in a spot where you won't roll off the boat if it comes to a sudden stop!

Porters waiting to leap on docking ferries jostle and fidget like swimmers on the starting blocks – if you don't fancy a swim, don't stand in front of them.

Watching the countryside drift by is amazing and relaxing. If you're lucky, you may spot a sluggish river dolphin. Sometimes you find yourself gliding over thick growths of water hyacinth close to the jungle-covered bank; at other times you're churning along a river so wide that neither of the banks are visible.

The Rocket

Rocket is the generic name that is given to special (paddle-wheel) BIWTC boats that run daily between Dhaka and Khulna, stopping at Chandpur, Barisal, Mongla and many other lesser ports en route.

The BIWTC is in the throes of trying to procure more Rockets, given the chequered history of the four in its possession. As the result of some major incidents that have left hundreds dead, the boating community is becoming more and more conscious of safety on the waterways.

If you're heading to the Sundarbans, Kolkata or the ruins at Bagerhat, travelling by Rocket is a great way to go for a major part of the journey. The north-south journey all the way to Khulna takes less than 30 hours, departing from Dhaka at 6pm every day but Friday and arriving at 8pm the following night. Going in the other direction,

the Rocket leaves Khulna at 3am and arrives in Dhaka at 5.40am.

CLASSES

Inter and deck classes are similar to those in ferries, and again, foreigners are highly unlikely to be sold tickets in either of these classes.

Rockets are not particularly glamorous by Mississippi paddle-wheel standards, but they do have paddle wheels. All have two levels. The front half of the upper deck of the old paddle-wheel steamer is reserved for 1st-class passengers, most of them, typically, Bangladeshis – this is not a tourist boat. There are eight cabins in this section – four doubles and four singles. Inside, floors are carpeted and each cabin has a washbasin and a narrow bunk bed or two with reasonably comfortable mattresses, freshly painted white walls, wood panelling and good lighting. Bathrooms with toilets and showers are shared. Bathrooms get progressively less clean as the trip goes on.

The central room has overhead fans, a long sofa and dining tables where meals are eaten. Meals are not included in ticket prices. There are both Bangladeshi and Western options, or you can go for a walk into the lower-class areas, where you can buy cheaper snacks.

The real highlight of 1st class, though, is the outside deck at the front of the boat, where you can sit while stewards serve tea and biscuits, and the Padma flows by.

Second class is at the back of the boat. Rooms are smaller than those in 1st class, and have no washbasin and no bed linen. There are small fans, though, and some chairs outside your door for scenery-gazing. If you are staying back here, it might be possible for you to dine in 1st class, for a fee, naturally.

In Dhaka tickets are available from the well-marked BIWTC office (Map pp56-7) in the modern commercial district of Motijheel. Book your tickets in advance. The boat leaves from Sadarghat terminal on the Buriganga River and, on rare occasions, from Badam Tole, a boat terminal 1km north. When leaving from Khulna, you should be allowed to sleep the night before in your cabin as departure is at 3am. They move the boat to a different anchorage for the night, so get aboard early. Sometime after midnight the boat steams back to the loading dock.

Prices in this book are generally for 1st/2nd/deck class.

Traditional River Boats

There are about 60 types of boats plying the rivers of Bangladesh. Steamers are only one type – the rest are traditional wooden boats of all shapes and sizes, some with sails but most without. These smaller boats plying the smaller rivers are the only way to see life along the riverbanks. On a bigger boat out on the wide Padma, you'll see lots of big launches, traditional boats and maybe some river dolphins, but you might not see people fishing with their nets, children waving from the shore, farmers working in unimaginably green paddy fields and women brightening up the river banks with their colourful saris.

The problem with taking boats on the minor rivers, and the reason why travellers almost never do this, is the difficulty in finding out where to board them and where they're heading. There is no 'system'; you simply have to ask around. If you see two towns on a map with a river connecting them, you can be sure that boats travel between them, and if there's no obvious road connecting them, there will be lots of passenger boats plying the route.

Barisal (p96) is a great place in which to embark on such memorable adventures.

BUS

Bus travel is cheap and, though it might not seem so, relatively efficient. A six-hour trip on a coach costs around Tk 200, and about half as much for a local bus.

The country has an extensive system of passable roads. When your bus encounters a river crossing, it generally comes on the ferry with you, and the smoky queues of buses waiting to be loaded is one of the more frustrating aspects of travel here. If you don't mind paying another fare, you can always leave your bus and get on one at the head of the queue.

For the lengthy ferry crossings of the mighty Padma, you may have to leave your bus and pick up another one from the same company waiting on the other side. These major inland ghats are a mass of boats, people and vehicles, so expect to be confused – pick out someone on your bus and follow them off the ferry. In any case, the bus assistant continues with the passengers, so you're unlikely to get left behind if you take a while finding your bus after the crossing.

It's illegal to ride on top of a bus, like the locals do, but the police won't stop you. If you do ride on top, though, remember that low trees kill quite a few people each year.

RUSHING ROULETTE

Bus travel in Bangladesh is something of a 'rushing roulette'. The astounding number of accidents that occur every day attests to the fact that Bangladeshi bus drivers are among the most reckless in the world. Currently around 12,000 people a year die on Bangladeshi roads (yes, that's 32 people a day)! Some people claim that this is because of the sheer volume of traffic – an opinion you might find hard to believe when you see how empty the highways are! You may even be advised that buses are simply too dangerous to catch, and that the only safe way to travel between cities is to fly.

If you're not involved in an accident, you will most likely witness one, or at least its aftermath. The main problem is that roads aren't really wide enough for two buses to pass without pulling onto the verge, which is inevitably crowded with rickshaws and pedestrians. All this swerving, yelling and honking can amount to the most exhausting and stressful experience you're likely to have sitting down.

Exercise some judgment. The law of probabilities suggests that a local bus covered with dents will continue to be. Coaches, on the other hand, tend to be more looked after. If you find yourself on a bus with a driver who is more reckless than the average reckless driver, don't be bashful about just getting off. Far better to be stranded on the side of the road than lying on it. However, the most important rule of all might be: DON'T travel at night. Nobody appears to have discovered the on/off switch for their vehicle's lights and the sheer number of unlit people, animals, cars, bikes, UFOs etc on the road after dark would be bad enough on its own, but even worse, on certain routes (such as the Dhaka–Chittagong road) trucks are forbidden from driving in daylight hours and all make the mad dash at night. All this makes night driving more risky than a suicide attempt.

Most bus stations are located on the outskirts of towns, often with different stations for different destinations. This helps reduce traffic jams in town (if you've come from India you'll appreciate the difference), but it often means quite a trek to find your bus. Chair-coach companies, however, usually have their own individual offices, often in the centre of town, and it's at these offices, not at the major terminals, that you must reserve your seat.

Chair Coaches

The safest and most comfortable options are chair coaches, which are distinguished by their adjustable seats and extra leg room. Where possible, take one of these large modern buses on journeys of more than three or four hours. They are not faster on the road – nothing could possibly go faster than the usually out-of-control ordinary buses! However, departure hours are fixed and seats must be reserved in advance, so unlike with regular buses, there's no time wasted filling up the seats and aisles. In addition, they are less crowded, often with no people in the aisles and, most importantly for taller people, there's plenty of leg room.

Most chair-coach services travelling between Dhaka and cities on the western side of the country operate at night, typically departing sometime between 5pm and 9pm and arriving in Dhaka at or before dawn. Whilst you'll save on a night's accommodation, you'll arrive at your destination very tired, having had little sleep. Worse still, the already dangerous daytime roads are treacherous at night. You would do well to try and avoid night buses.

There are two classes of chair coach – those with air-con and those without. Those with air-con cost about twice those without. All chair coaches are express buses, but not vice versa. Some serve snacks and drinks on board, and occasionally screen videos – but trust us, a video coach isn't as good as it sounds!

Some of the best chair-coach companies are **Eagle Paribahan** (☎ 02-710 1504), **Green Line** (☎ 02-710 0301), **Hanif Enterprise** (☎ 02-831 3869) and **Soudia** (☎ 02-801 8445).

Ordinary Buses

Among the ordinary buses there are express buses and local ones, which stop en route. The latter charge about 25% less but are slow. In

more remote areas local buses may be your only option. Most buses are large, but there are a few minivans (coasters).

The buses run by private companies tend to be in much better condition than those of the state-run BRTC buses.

Ordinary buses are seemingly made for the vertically challenged – the leg room does not allow anyone to sit with their knees forward. On long trips this can be exceedingly uncomfortable, so try and get an aisle seat. Another option, and one that will really make you feel like the rich foreigner, is to purchase two seats so that you can spread out a little more. Having said that, though, when an elderly lady is left standing in the aisle for eight hours because of a lack of seats, you'd have to have a heart of steel not to give in and give up your additional seat!

Women travelling alone sit together up the front, separate from the men. If there is an accident, this is the most dangerous part of the bus to be on. Women travelling with their husbands normally sit in the main section, preferably on the window side. On long-distance bus trips cha (tea) stops can be agonisingly infrequent and a real hassle for women travellers – toilet facilities are rare indeed and sometimes hard to find when they do exist.

One of the most underappreciated professions would have to be that of bus-wallah. These are the men who half hang out the door helping people on and off, load goats onto the roof, bang on the side of the bus telling the driver to stop and go, and uncannily keep track of who needs how much change. They are usually extremely helpful – they often rearrange things so you are comfortably seated and rarely fail to let you know when the bus has arrived at your destination.

CAR

Travelling by private car has some obvious advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, it gives you the freedom to quickly and easily go where you please, when you please, and allows for all manner of unexpected pit stops and adventures. On the minus side, it does insulate you somewhat from Bangladesh and it is far more expensive than public transport.

Travelling by car has two possibilities: either you'll be driving your own vehicle or you'll be the passenger in a rental car, which comes complete with its own driver.

Hire

Self-drive rental cars are not available in Bangladesh, and that's probably a good thing. However, renting cars with drivers is easy, at least in the big towns.

In Dhaka there are innumerable companies in the rental business; the best ones are recommended on p68. Expect to pay about Tk 3000/2400 a day for a car with/without air-con, plus fuel and driver expenses. Almost all taxis now run on LPG as well as diesel – filling a tank with gas will cost around Tk 100, but as yet this can only be done in the biggest cities, which means that on any extended road trip you will need to refill with diesel, which currently costs an ever rising Tk 68 a litre. There's only one other extra: when you stay out of town overnight, you must pay for the driver's food and lodging, which should come to around Tk 350. They don't try to hide this, but make sure you determine beforehand what those rates will be, to avoid any misunderstandings. Insurance isn't required because you aren't the driver.

Outside Dhaka, the cost of renting vehicles is often marginally less, but actually finding an available car and driver is much harder and virtually impossible if you want an air-con vehicle. Asking at the nearest Parjatan office or the town's top hotel can normally produce results (though they will add a percentage fee).

Owner-Drivers

Driving in Bangladesh, especially on the Dhaka-Chittagong Hwy or within 100km of Dhaka, takes a bit of guts (stupidity?). On the major highways, you'll be pushed onto the curb every few minutes by large buses hurtling down the road. Dhaka presents its own unique driving perils because of the vast number of rickshaws and baby taxis. It's a far better – and safer – option to hire a car and driver (see above).

It's sad to say, but if you're in a serious or fatal traffic accident (and, God forbid, you're responsible), the local custom is to flee, if you can. No-one has much faith in the justice system, so there is an element of self-law in the form of an angry crowd. Newspaper reports of road accidents typically end with words like 'the driver absconded on foot' or 'miscreants beat the driver to a bloody pulp'.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it.

Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs, and let someone know where they are planning to go. Solo women are particularly unwise to hitchhike. Unless you get picked up by an expat or fellow tourists, you will be expected, as the locals do, to pay for any ride.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Bangladesh has an amazing range of vehicles – on any highway you can see buses, cars, trucks, rickshaws, baby taxis, tempos (oversized auto-rickshaws), tractors with trays laden with people, motorbikes, scooters, bicycles carrying four people, bullock and water-buffalo carts, and bizarre homemade vehicles all competing for space. One local favourite in Rajshahi division is a sort of minitractor powered by incredibly noisy irrigation pump motors.

In Dhaka and Chittagong motorised transportation has increased tremendously over the last 10 years, and traffic jams in Central Dhaka are a nightmare. The problem continues to be due more to rickshaws than cars, and Dhaka has to be the only place on the planet where you can get caught up in a snarling hour-long traffic jam consisting entirely of rainbow-coloured bicycles and cycle-rickshaws.

What freaks out new arrivals the most is the total chaos that seems to pervade the streets, with drivers doing anything they please and pedestrians being the least of anybody's worries. Accidents do happen and sometimes people are killed, but the odds of your being involved are still fairly slim.

Where possible it can be wise to negotiate fares beforehand to avoid hassles at the other end, though you will be surprised at how often people don't overcharge you on principle. If you are hassled, a good strategy is to keep the discussion going long enough for a crowd to form, which won't be long. This crowd of strangers is something of a people's court, and more often than not is an impressively fair adjudicator. Once deliberations are over and the court has handed down its verdict, the honourable thing for both parties to do is graciously acquiesce.

Baby Taxi

In Bangladesh three-wheeled auto-rickshaws are called baby taxis. As with the rickshaw-

wallahs, baby-taxi drivers almost never own their vehicles. They're owned by powerful fleet-owners called *mohajons*, who rent them out on an eight-hour basis. Also like rickshaws, they're designed to take two or three people, but entire families can and do fit.

In Dhaka and Chittagong baby taxis are everywhere – most people use these instead of regular taxis. Faster and more comfortable than rickshaws on most trips, baby taxis cost about twice as much. You'll also find them at Dhaka and Chittagong airports and they charge less than half the taxi fare, but the ride into town from either airport is long and not ideal after a tiring long-haul flight. Outside of these two metropolises, baby taxis are much rarer. In towns such as Rangpur, Dinajpur and Barisal they virtually don't exist.

In Dhaka you can go from Gulshan II to Central Dhaka for around Tk 100. For distances that won't clock over Tk 25, you are better off taking a rickshaw.

In addition to baby taxis, every so often you'll see a *mishuk* (mee-*shuk*), which is a similar vehicle that is slightly narrower and, if you look closely, is driven by a motorised chain like that on a bicycle.

Boat

Given that there are some 8433km of navigable inland waterways, boats are a common means of getting around. You may have to pay a few taka here and there to be ferried from one side of a river to the other, or hire a wooden boat to get from town to town.

Bus

The only real difference between local buses and long-distance buses is how you catch them – in the case of local buses, literally. It can be something of a death-defying process. Firstly, assess whether the bus will get you to your desired destination by screaming the name of the destination to the man hanging out the door. If he responds in the affirmative, run towards him, grab firmly onto a handle, if there is one, or him if there isn't, and jump aboard, remembering to check for oncoming traffic.

Rickshaw

In Bangladesh all rickshaws are bicycle driven; there are none of the human-puller variety. Rickshaw-wallahs usually do not speak English and often don't know much

of the layout of their town beyond their own area, so if you'll be going a good distance and you're not sure where you're going, don't expect them to be able to help much in locating your destination – you probably won't be able to explain yourself anyway. You may find some English-speaking wallahs hanging around outside top-end hotels.

To hail a rickshaw, stick your arm straight out and wave your hand downwards – the usual way of waving your arm upwards used in the West appears to a Bangladeshi as 'Go away! To hell with you!'

Fares vary a lot, and you must bargain if you care about paying twice as much as locals, although it still isn't very expensive. In any case, it is unrealistic to expect to pay exactly what Bangladeshis do. If you can get away with paying a 25% premium, you'll be doing exceptionally well. At the other end of the paying spectrum, there is sometimes a temptation to be overly generous. Try not to succumb to the warm feeling you know you'll get from doing so, and just be reasonable. Around Tk 50 per hour or Tk 6 per km, with a minimum fare of Tk 10 (and up to double that much in Dhaka), is normal.

Unlike in some other places, you can relax your guard in Bangladesh as most people are not out to rip you off. In fact, you're more likely to be surprised at how proud and honest these hard-working men can be.

Taxi

Taxis are abundant in Dhaka. You might be able to hail one down on the side of the road if they are on their way to their usual hang-out, but if they're all occupied you are better off heading straight to an intersection or top-end hotel, where you will find a fleet of them waiting. Taxis are all metered, though there is no way any driver will use the meter with a foreigner, so you should negotiate the fare before boarding.

Outside Dhaka there are precious few taxis. In Chittagong you'll find a few at the airport or at large hotels and around GEC Circle. In Sylhet, Khulna, Saidpur and possibly Rajshahi you'll see no taxis except for a few at the airport. They are not marked, so you'll have to ask someone to point them out to you.

Tempo

This is a larger version of a baby taxi, with a cabin in the back. Tempos run set routes,

like buses, and while they cost far less than baby taxis, they're more uncomfortable because of the small space into which the dozen or so passengers are squeezed. On the other hand, they're a lot faster than rickshaws and as cheap or cheaper. Outside Dhaka and Chittagong they're a lot more plentiful than baby taxis – you will find them even in relatively small towns.

TRAIN

Trains are a lot easier on the nerves, knees and backside than buses, and those plying the major routes aren't too bad, while in 1st class they are positively luxurious. However, travel is slowed down by unbridged rivers requiring ferry crossings, circuitous routing and different gauges. This means that a train ride can sometimes take up to twice as long as a bus ride.

The recent introduction of computerised ticketing has made the purchase of train tickets from major stations far less of a headache than it used to be.

Classes

Intercity (IC) trains are frequent, relatively fast, clean and reasonably punctual, especially in the eastern zone. Fares in 1st class are fairly high (about a third more than an air-con chair coach), but in *sulob* (2nd class with reserved seating and better carriages than ordinary 2nd class) the fare is comparable to that in a non-air-con chair coach, and the trip is a lot more pleasant.

The carriages in 1st class, which have three seats across, facing each other and separated by a small table, initially seem little different from those in *sulob*, which have four seats across without tables. However, the difference is that there's always room for just one more passenger in *sulob*, whereas in 1st class what you see is what you get. Some IC trains also have an air-con 1st class, which is well worth the extra money. Seats here are of the soft and comfortable variety and are similar to those found on trains in the West. This class is always very popular but seats are limited – it's a good idea to reserve at least several days in advance to get a seat or berth in air-con 1st class, though a quiet word to the station master can often work wonders.

There are generally no buffet cars, but sandwiches, Indian snacks and drinks are available from attendants. If you're lucky, these attend-

ants will be sharply dressed waiters handing out dainty china cups of tea.

Second-class cars with unreserved seating are always an overcrowded mess and on mail trains (which do allow for some passenger cargo) your trip will be even slower than on an IC train. However, you may come out of the experience with a few good stories.

The only sleepers are on night trains, and the fare is about 40% more than 1st class.

On the poorly maintained local trains, 2nd class is crowded and uncomfortable, though remarkably cheap – less than a third the price of 1st class. Unreserved 2nd class has so many class categories and combinations above it (1st class, *sulob*, seating, sleeping, air-con, non-air-con) that it's technically lower than 3rd class and it feels like it. On some trains there are only 2nd-class compartments.

Costs

As a rough indication, the 259km journey from Rajshahi to Dhaka costs Tk 630 for a 1st-class air-con berth, Tk 425 for a 1st-class air-con seat, Tk 290 for a 1st-class non-air-con seat and Tk 165 for *sulob*.

Prices in this book are generally for 1st/*sulob* class, and 1st-class prices are usually for air-con seats.

Reservations

For IC and mail trains, ticket clerks will naturally assume that you, as a seemingly rich foreigner, want the most expensive seats, unless you make it clear otherwise. Buying tickets on local trains is a drag because they don't go on sale until the train is about to arrive, which means that while you're battling the ticket queue all the seats are being filled by hordes of locals. It's almost always better to take a bus than a local train.

Printed timetables are not available, so understanding the convoluted rules of train travel is not easy, even for railway staff. It usually isn't too difficult to find a stationmaster who speaks English. Dhaka's modern Kamlapur station is the exception – schedules are clearly marked on large signs in Bengali and English, but you'll have to double-check to make sure they are correct. Some schedules, particularly on the Dhaka–Sylhet route, change by half an hour or so between the summer and winter seasons, and the signs may not be updated. You can phone the station, but inquiries in person are more likely to yield a reliable result. When making

TRAIN STATION PHONE NUMBERS

City	Reservations	General Inquiries/Station Manager
Dhaka	☎ 935 8634	☎ 01711 691612
Chittagong	☎ 635 162	☎ 01711 691550
Sylhet	☎ 717 036	☎ 01711 691656
Rajshahi	☎ 776 040	
Khulna	☎ 723 222	

inquiries, it's best to keep things as simple as possible: specify when and where you want to go, and which type of train you want to catch.

If your queries are too much for counter staff, try the District Information Officer (DIO) at Kamlapur station (in the administration annexe just south of the main station building).

If the crowds that silently follow you around the platform get you down (and they will), ask for the waiting room to be unlocked, or establish yourself in the office of an official who speaks English.

Rural railway stations are prone to power failures – hang onto your luggage if the lights go out.

Health

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Travellers tend to worry about contracting infectious diseases in this part of the world, but infections are a rare cause of *serious* illness or death in travellers. Pre-existing medical conditions such as heart disease, and accidental injury (especially traffic accidents), account for most life-threatening problems. Becoming ill in some way, however, is very common.

Environmental issues such as heat and pollution can cause health problems. Hygiene is generally poor throughout the region so food- and waterborne illnesses are common. Many insect-borne diseases are present, particularly in tropical areas. Fortunately most travellers' illnesses can either be prevented with some common-sense behaviour or be treated easily with a well-stocked traveller's medical kit. Medical care remains basic so it is essential to be well prepared before travelling to Bangladesh.

The following advice is a general guide only and does not replace the advice of a doctor trained in travel medicine.

BEFORE YOU GO

Pack medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is very useful. If carrying syringes or

needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity. If you have a heart condition, bring a copy of your ECG taken just prior to travelling.

If you take any regular medication, bring double your needs in case of loss or theft. In most South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, you can buy many medications over the counter without a doctor's prescription, but it can be difficult to find some of the newer drugs, particularly the latest antidepressant drugs, blood-pressure medications and contraceptive pills, in particular outside Dhaka.

INSURANCE

Even if you are fit and healthy, don't travel without health insurance – accidents do happen. Declare any existing medical conditions you have – the insurance company *will* check if your problem is pre-existing and will not cover you if it is undeclared. You may require extra cover for adventure activities such as scuba diving. If your health insurance doesn't cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider getting extra insurance. If you're uninsured, emergency evacuation is expensive.

Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers, or whether the company will reimburse you later for your overseas health expenditures. (In many countries, including Bangladesh, doctors expect payment in cash.) Some insurance policies offer lower and higher medical-expense options; the higher ones are primarily for countries that have extremely high medical costs, such as the USA. You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and make a claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure you keep all documentation. Some policies ask you to call back (reverse charges) to a centre in your home country, where an immediate assessment of your problem is made.

VACCINATIONS

Specialised travel-medicine clinics are your best source of information; they stock all available vaccines and will be able to give

specific recommendations for you and your trip. The doctors will take into account factors such as your vaccination history, the length of your trip, activities you may be undertaking and underlying medical conditions, such as pregnancy.

Most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, so visit a doctor four to eight weeks before your planned departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as 'the yellow booklet'), which will list all the vaccinations you've received.

Recommended Vaccinations

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends the following vaccinations for travellers to South Asia:

Adult diphtheria & tetanus Single booster recommended if none in the previous 10 years. Side effects include sore arm and fever.

Hepatitis A Provides almost 100% protection for up to a year; a booster after 12 months provides at least another 20 years' protection. Mild side effects such as headache and sore arm occur in 5% to 10% of people.

Hepatitis B Now considered routine for most travellers. Given as three shots over six months. A rapid schedule is also available, as is a combined vaccination with Hepatitis A. Side effects are mild and uncommon, usually headache and sore arm. In 95% of people, lifetime protection results.

Measles, mumps & rubella Two doses of MMR are required unless you have had the diseases. Occasionally a rash and flu-like illness can develop a week after receiving the vaccine. Many young adults require a booster.

Polio In 2003 polio was still present in Nepal, India and Pakistan, but it has been eradicated in Bangladesh. Only one booster is required for an adult for lifetime protection. Inactivated polio vaccine is safe during pregnancy.

Typhoid Recommended for all travellers to Bangladesh, even if you only visit urban areas. The vaccine offers around 70% protection, lasts for two to three years and comes as a single shot. Tablets are also available, however the injection is usually recommended as it has fewer side effects. Sore arm and fever may occur.

Varicella If you haven't had chickenpox, discuss this vaccination with your doctor.

These immunisations are recommended for long-term travellers (more than one month) or those at special risk:

Japanese B Encephalitis Three injections in all. Booster recommended after two years. Sore arm and headache are the most common side effects. Rarely, an allergic reaction

comprising hives and swelling can occur up to 10 days after any of the three doses.

Meningitis Single injection. There are two types of vaccination: the quadrivalent vaccine gives two to three years' protection; meningitis group C vaccine gives around 10 years' protection. Recommended for long-term backpackers aged under 25.

Rabies Three injections in all. A booster after one year will then provide 10 years' protection. Side effects are rare – occasionally headache and sore arm.

Tuberculosis A complex issue. Long-term adult travellers are usually recommended to have a TB skin test before and after travel, rather than vaccination. Only one vaccine given in a lifetime.

Required Vaccinations

The only vaccine required by international regulations is yellow fever. Proof of vaccination will only be required if you have visited a country in the yellow-fever zone within the six days prior to entering Bangladesh. If you are travelling to Bangladesh from Africa or South America, you should check to see if you will require proof of vaccination.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Recommended items for a personal medical kit:

- antibacterial cream, eg Muciprocin
- antibiotic for skin infections, eg Amoxicillin/Clavulanate or Cephalexin
- antibiotics for diarrhoea, eg Norfloxacin or Ciprofloxacin; for bacterial diarrhoea, Azithromycin; for giardia or amoebic dysentery, Tinidazole
- antifungal cream, eg Clotrimazole
- antihistamine – there are many options, eg Cetirizine for daytime and Promethazine for night
- antiseptic, eg Betadine
- antispasmodic for stomach cramps, eg Buscopa
- contraceptive method
- decongestant, eg Pseudoephedrine
- DEET-based insect repellent
- diarrhoea treatment – consider an oral rehydration solution (eg Gastrolyte), diarrhoea 'stopper' (eg Loperamide) and antinausea medication (eg Prochlorperazine)
- first-aid items such as scissors, elasto-plasts, bandages, gauze, thermometer (but not mercury), sterile needles and syringes, safety pins and tweezers
- Ibuprofen or another anti-inflammatory

HEALTH ADVISORIES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel-health website before departure, if one is available:

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel)

Canada (www.travelhealth.gc.ca)

New Zealand (www.mfat.govt.nz/travel)

South Africa (www.dfa.gov.za/consular/travel_advice.htm)

UK (www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAdviceforTravellers/fs/en)

USA (www.cdc.gov/travel)

- indigestion tablets, such as Quick Eze or Mylanta
- iodine tablets to purify water (unless you are pregnant or have a thyroid problem)
- laxative, eg Coloxyl
- migraine medicine – take your personal medicine
- paracetamol
- permethrin to impregnate clothing and mosquito nets
- steroid cream for allergic/itchy rashes, eg 1% to 2% hydrocortisone
- sunscreen and hat
- throat lozenges
- thrush (vaginal yeast infection) treatment, eg Clotrimazole pessaries or Diflucan tablet
- Ural or equivalent, if you're prone to urine infections.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the internet. For further information, **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. The **World Health Organization** (WHO; www.who.int/ith) publishes a superb book called *International Travel and Health*, which is revised annually and available online at no cost. Another website of general interest is **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel-health recommendations for every country and is updated daily. The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC; www.cdc.gov) website also has good general information.

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel – Asia & India* is a handy pocket size and packed with useful information including pretrip planning, emergency first aid, immunisa-

tion and disease information, and what to do if you get sick on the road. Other recommended references include *Traveller's Health* by Dr Richard Dawood and *Travelling Well* by Dr Deborah Mills – check out the website (www.travellingwell.com.au).

IN TRANSIT

DEEP-VEIN THROMBOSIS

Deep-vein thrombosis (DVT) occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and difficulty in breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones; it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, seek exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine), promethazine (Phenergan) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN BANGLADESH

AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE

In general, medical facilities are not up to international standards and serious cases are likely to be evacuated. Facilities are se-

verely limited outside the major cities and, as a result, it can be difficult to find reliable medical care in rural areas. Your embassy and insurance company can be good contacts. Recommended clinics are listed on p50 in the Dhaka chapter.

Self-treatment may be appropriate if your problem is minor (eg traveller's diarrhoea), you are carrying the relevant medication and you cannot attend a recommended clinic. If you think you may have a serious disease, especially malaria (see p186), do not waste time – travel to the nearest quality facility to receive attention.

Buying medication over the counter is not recommended, as fake medications and drugs that have been poorly stored or are out-of-date are common.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Coughs, Colds & Chest Infections

Respiratory infections are common in Bangladesh. This usually starts as a virus and is exacerbated by environmental conditions such as pollution in the cities, or cold and altitude in the mountains. Commonly a secondary bacterial infection will intervene – marked by fever, chest pain and coughing up discoloured or blood-tinged sputum. If you have the symptoms of an infection, seek medical advice or commence a general antibiotic.

Dengue Fever

This mosquito-borne disease is becoming increasingly problematic in the tropical world, especially in the cities. As there is no vaccine available it can only be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites. The mosquito that carries dengue bites day and night, so use insect avoidance measures at all times. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache and body ache (dengue was previously known as 'breakbone fever'). Some people develop a rash and experience diarrhoea. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol – do not take aspirin as it increases the likelihood of haemorrhaging. See a doctor to be diagnosed and monitored.

Hepatitis A

A problem throughout the region, this food- and waterborne virus infects the liver, causing jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), nausea and lethargy. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A, you just need to allow time

for the liver to heal. All travellers heading to South Asia should be vaccinated against hepatitis A.

Hepatitis B

The only sexually transmitted disease that can be prevented by vaccination, hepatitis B is spread by body fluids, including sexual contact. In some parts of South Asia up to 20% of the population are carriers of hepatitis B, and usually are unaware of this. In Bangladesh the number of carriers is just below 10%. The long-term consequences can include liver cancer and cirrhosis.

Hepatitis E

Transmitted through contaminated food and water, hepatitis E has similar symptoms to hepatitis A, but is far less common. It is a severe problem in pregnant women and can result in the death of both mother and baby. There is currently no vaccine, and prevention is by following safe eating and drinking guidelines.

HIV

HIV is spread via contaminated body fluids. Avoid unsafe sex, unsterile needles (including those in medical facilities) and procedures such as tattoos. The rate of HIV infection in South Asia is growing more rapidly than anywhere else in the world.

Influenza

Present year-round in the tropics, influenza (flu) symptoms include high fever, muscle aches, runny nose, cough and sore throat. It can be very severe in people over the age of 65 or in those with underlying medical conditions such as heart disease or diabetes – vaccination is recommended for these individuals. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol.

Japanese B Encephalitis

This viral disease is transmitted by mosquitoes and is rare in travellers. Like most mosquito-borne diseases it is becoming a more common problem in affected countries. Most cases occur in rural areas and vaccination is recommended for travellers spending more than one month outside of cities. There is no treatment, and a third of infected people will die, while another third will suffer permanent brain damage.

Malaria

For such a serious and potentially deadly disease, there is an enormous amount of misinformation concerning malaria. You must get expert advice as to whether your trip puts you at risk. Outside Dhaka, the risk of contracting malaria far outweighs the risk of any tablet side effects. Remember that malaria can be fatal. Before you travel, seek medical advice on the right medication and dosage for you. Malaria in South Asia, including Bangladesh, is chloroquine resistant.

Malaria is caused by a parasite, transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito. The most important symptom of malaria is fever, but general symptoms such as headache, diarrhoea, cough or chills may also occur. A diagnosis can only be made by taking a blood sample.

Two strategies should be combined to prevent malaria – mosquito avoidance, and antimalarial medications. Most people who catch malaria are taking inadequate or no antimalarial medication.

Travellers are advised to prevent mosquito bites by taking these steps:

- Use a DEET-containing insect repellent on exposed skin. Wash this off at night, as long as you are sleeping under a mosquito net. Natural repellents such as citronella can be effective, but must be applied more frequently than products containing DEET.
- Sleep under a mosquito net impregnated with permethrin.
- Choose accommodation with screens and fans (if not air-conditioned).
- Impregnate clothing with permethrin in high-risk areas.
- Wear long sleeves and trousers in light colours.
- Use mosquito coils.
- Spray your room with insect repellent before going out for your evening meal.

There are a variety of medications available:

Doxycycline This daily tablet is a broad-spectrum antibiotic that has the added benefit of helping to prevent a variety of tropical diseases including leptospirosis, tick-borne diseases and typhus. The potential side effects include photosensitivity (a tendency to sunburn), thrush in women, indigestion, heartburn, nausea and interference with the contraceptive pill. More serious side effects include ulceration of the oesophagus – you can help prevent this by taking your tablet with a meal and a large glass of water, and never

lying down within half an hour of taking it. It must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

Lariam (Mefloquine) Lariam has received much bad press, some of it justified, some not. This weekly tablet suits many people. Serious side effects are rare but include depression, anxiety, psychosis and having fits. Anyone with a history of depression, anxiety, other psychological disorders or epilepsy should not take Lariam. It is considered safe in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. Tablets must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

Malarone This drug is a combination of Atovaquone and Proguanil. Side effects are uncommon and mild, most commonly nausea and headache. It is the best tablet for scuba divers and for those on short trips to high-risk areas. It must be taken for one week after leaving the risk area.

A final option is to take no preventive medication but to have a supply of emergency medication should you develop the symptoms of malaria. This is less than ideal, and you'll need to get to a good medical facility within 24 hours of developing a fever. If you choose this option, the most effective and safest treatment is Malarone (four tablets once daily for three days). Other options include Mefloquine and Quinine but the side effects of these drugs at treatment doses make them less desirable. Fansidar is no longer recommended.

Measles

Measles remains a significant problem in Bangladesh. This highly contagious bacterial infection is spread via coughing and sneezing. Most people born before 1966 are immune as they had the disease in childhood. Measles starts with a high fever and rash, and can be complicated by pneumonia and brain disease. There is no specific treatment.

Rabies

This is a common problem in South Asia. Around 30,000 people die from rabies in India alone each year, and there are more than 2000 deaths annually in Bangladesh. This uniformly fatal disease is spread by the bite or lick of an infected animal – most commonly a dog or monkey. You should seek medical advice immediately after any animal bite and commence postexposure treatment. Having pretravel vaccination means the postbite treatment is greatly simplified. If an animal bites you, gently wash the wound with soap and water, and apply iodine-based antiseptic. If you are not pre-vaccinated, you will need

to receive rabies immunoglobulin as soon as possible. This is very difficult to obtain outside Dhaka.

STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases most common in Bangladesh include herpes, warts, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. People carrying these diseases often have no signs of infection. Condoms will prevent gonorrhoea and chlamydia but not warts or herpes. If, after a sexual encounter, you develop any rash, lumps, discharge or pain when passing urine, seek immediate medical attention. If you have been sexually active during your travels, have an STD check on your return home.

Tuberculosis

While TB is rare in travellers, those who have significant contact with the local population, such as medical and aid workers, and long-term travellers, should take precautions. Vaccination is usually only given to children under the age of five, but adults at risk are recommended to have pre- and post-travel TB testing. The main symptoms are fever, cough, weight loss, night sweats and tiredness.

Typhoid

This serious bacterial infection is also spread via food and water. It gives a high and slowly progressive fever and headache, and may be accompanied by a dry cough and stomach pain. It is diagnosed by blood tests and treated with antibiotics. Vaccination is recommended for all travellers spending more than a week in South Asia. India and Nepal pose a particularly high risk and have the added problem of significant antibiotic resistance. In Bangladesh the risk is medium level but the infection is also antibiotic resistant. Be aware that vaccination is not 100% effective, so you must still be careful with what you eat and drink.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Traveller's diarrhoea is by far the most common problem affecting travellers – between 30% and 70% of people will suffer from it within two weeks of starting their trip. In over 80% of cases, traveller's diarrhoea is caused by a bacteria, and therefore responds promptly to treatment with antibiotics. Treatment with antibiotics will depend on your situation – how sick you are, how quickly you need to get better, where you are etc.

Traveller's diarrhoea is defined as the passage of more than three watery bowel actions within 24 hours, plus at least one other symptom such as fever, cramps, nausea, vomiting or generally feeling unwell.

Treatment consists of staying well hydrated; rehydration solutions such as Gastrolyte are the best for this. Antibiotics such as Norfloxacin, Ciprofloxacin or Azithromycin will kill the bacteria quickly.

Loperamide is just a 'stopper' and doesn't get to the cause of the problem. It can be helpful, for example if you have to go on a long bus ride. Don't take Loperamide if you have a fever, or blood in your stools. Seek medical attention quickly if you do not respond to an appropriate antibiotic.

Amoebic Dysentery

Amoebic dysentery is rare in travellers but is often misdiagnosed by poor-quality labs in South Asia. Symptoms are similar to bacterial diarrhoea, ie fever, bloody diarrhoea and generally feeling unwell. You should always seek reliable medical care if you have blood in your diarrhoea. Treatment involves two drugs: Tinidazole or Metronidazole to kill the parasite in your gut, and then a second drug to kill the cysts. If left untreated, complications such as liver or gut abscesses can occur. Bacterial dysentery is more common.

Giardiasis

Giardia is a parasite that is relatively common in travellers. Symptoms include nausea, bloating, excess gas, fatigue and intermittent diarrhoea. 'Eggy' burps are often attributed solely to giardia, but work in Nepal has shown that they are not specific to giardia. The parasite will eventually go away if left untreated but this can take months. The treatment of choice is Tinidazole, with Metronidazole being a second-line option.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Air Pollution

If you have severe respiratory problems, speak with your doctor before travelling to any heavily polluted urban centres. Dhaka is one of the most polluted cities in the world. This pollution also causes minor respiratory problems such as sinusitis, dry throat and irritated eyes. If troubled by the pollution, leave the city for a few days and get some fresh air.

DRINKING WATER

- Never drink tap water, and avoid ice
- Bottled water is generally safe – check the seal is intact at purchase and that it is labelled 'arsenic free' (see p38)
- Avoid fresh juices – they may have been watered down
- Boiling water is the most efficient method of purifying it
- The best chemical purifier is iodine. It should not be used by pregnant women or those with thyroid problems.
- Water filters should also filter out viruses. Ensure your filter has a chemical barrier such as iodine and a small pore size, eg less than four microns.

Food

Eating in restaurants is the biggest risk factor for contracting traveller's diarrhoea. Ways to avoid it include eating only freshly cooked food, and avoiding shellfish and food that has been sitting around in buffets. Peel all fruit, cook vegetables, and soak salads in iodine water for at least 20 minutes. Eat in busy restaurants with a high turnover of customers.

Heat

Parts of Bangladesh are hot and humid throughout the year. For most people it takes at least two weeks to adapt to the hot climate. Swelling of the feet and ankles is common, as are muscle cramps caused by excessive sweating. Prevent these by avoiding dehydration and excessive activity in the heat. Take it easy when you first arrive. Don't eat salt tablets (they aggravate the gut), but drinking rehydration solution or eating salty food helps. Treat cramps by stopping activity, resting, rehydrating with double-strength rehydration solution, and gently stretching.

Dehydration is the main contributor to heat exhaustion. Symptoms include feeling weak, headache, irritability, nausea or vomiting, sweaty skin, a fast weak pulse and a normal or slightly elevated body temperature. Treatment involves getting out of the heat and/or sun, fanning the victim and applying cool wet cloths to the skin, laying the victim flat with their legs raised, and rehydrating with water containing ¼ teaspoon of salt per

litre. Recovery is usually rapid but it is common to feel weak for some days afterwards.

Heatstroke is a serious medical emergency. Symptoms come on suddenly and include weakness, nausea, a hot, dry body with a temperature of over 41°C, dizziness, confusion, loss of coordination, fits and eventually collapse and loss of consciousness. Seek medical help and commence cooling by getting the person out of the heat, removing their clothes, fanning them, and applying cool wet cloths or ice to their body, especially to the groin and armpits.

Prickly heat is a common skin rash in the tropics, caused by sweat being trapped under the skin. The result is an itchy rash of tiny lumps. Treat by moving out of the heat and into an air-conditioned area for a few hours and by having cool showers. Creams and ointments clog the skin, so they should be avoided. Locally bought prickly-heat powder can be helpful.

Tropical fatigue is common in long-term expatriates based in the tropics. It's rarely due to disease and is caused by the climate, inadequate mental rest, excessive alcohol intake and the demands of daily work in a different culture.

Insect Bites & Stings

Bedbugs don't carry disease but their bites are very itchy. They live in the cracks of furniture and walls, and then migrate to the bed at night to feed on you. You can treat the itch with an antihistamine.

Lice inhabit various parts of your body but most commonly your head and pubic area. Transmission is via close contact with an infected person. They can be difficult to treat and you may need numerous applications of an antilice shampoo such as permethrin. Pubic lice are usually contracted from sexual contact.

Ticks are contracted after walking in rural areas. They are commonly found behind the ears, on the belly and in the armpits. If you have had a tick bite and experience symptoms such as a rash at the site of the bite or elsewhere, fever or muscle aches, you should see a doctor. Doxycycline prevents tick-borne diseases.

Leeches are found in humid rainforest areas. They do not transmit any disease but their bites are often intensely itchy for weeks afterwards and can easily become infected.

Apply an iodine-based antiseptic to any leech bite to help prevent infection.

Skin Problems

Fungal rashes are common in humid climates. There are two common fungal rashes that affect travellers. The first occurs in moist areas that get less air, such as the groin, armpits and between the toes. It starts as a red patch that slowly spreads and is usually itchy. Treatment involves keeping the skin dry, avoiding chafing and using an antifungal cream such as Clotrimazole or Lamisil. *Tinea versicolor* is also common – this fungus causes small, light-coloured patches, most commonly on the back, chest and shoulders. Consult a doctor.

Cuts and scratches become easily infected in humid climates. Take meticulous care of any cuts and scratches to prevent complications such as abscesses. Immediately wash all wounds in clean water and apply antiseptic. If you develop signs of infection (increasing pain and redness), see a doctor. Divers and surfers should be particularly careful with coral cuts as they become easily infected.

Sunburn

Even on a cloudy day sunburn can occur rapidly. Always use a strong sunscreen (at least factor 30), making sure to reapply after a swim, and always wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses outdoors. Avoid lying in the sun during the hottest part of the day (10am to 2pm). If you become sunburnt, stay out of the sun until you have recovered, apply cool compresses and take painkillers for the discomfort. One percent hydrocortisone cream applied twice daily is also helpful.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Pregnant women should receive specialised advice before travelling. The ideal time to travel is in the second trimester (be-

tween 16 and 28 weeks), when the risk of pregnancy-related problems is at its lowest and pregnant women generally feel at their best. During the first trimester there is a risk of miscarriage, and in the third trimester complications such as premature labour and high blood pressure are possible. It's wise to travel with a companion. Always carry a list of quality medical facilities available at your destination and ensure you continue your standard antenatal care at these facilities. Avoid rural travel in areas with poor transportation and medical facilities. Most of all, ensure your travel insurance covers all pregnancy-related possibilities, including premature labour.

Malaria is a high-risk disease in pregnancy. WHO recommends that pregnant women do not travel to areas with Chloroquine-resistant malaria. None of the more effective antimalarial drugs are completely safe in pregnancy.

Hepatitis E is a particular problem for pregnant women – if it is contracted in the third trimester, 30% of women and their babies will die.

Traveller's diarrhoea can quickly lead to dehydration and result in inadequate blood flow to the placenta. Many of the drugs used to treat various diarrhoea bugs are not recommended in pregnancy. Azithromycin is considered safe.

In the urban areas of Bangladesh, supplies of sanitary products are readily available. Birth-control options may be limited so bring adequate supplies of your own form of contraception. Heat, humidity and antibiotics can all contribute to thrush. Treatment is with antifungal creams and pessaries such as Clotrimazole. A practical alternative is a single tablet of Fluconazole (Diflucan). Urinary tract infections can be precipitated by dehydration or long bus journeys without toilet stops; bring suitable antibiotics.

Language

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Bengali (also widely known as Bangla) is the national language of Bangladesh and the official language of the state of West Bengal in India. Bengali is the easternmost of the Indo-European languages with its roots in Prakrit, the vernacular (ie commonly spoken) form of Pali, which was the original language of the Buddhist scriptures. In addition to Arabic, Urdu and Persian words, the Sanskrit of Brahmin Hindus was assimilated into the local speech, giving Bengali a strong resemblance to Hindi, with some variation in pronunciation. The vocabulary was further expanded through contact with European traders and merchants. Today, Bengali has a number of regional variations, but remains essentially the same throughout Bangladesh.

HISTORY

The modern development of Bengali as a symbol of the cultural individuality of Bangladesh began under the British. In keeping with the Raj's policy of working within local cultures, Bengali was taught to officers, who used it in their dealings with locals. This resulted in the fusion of the vernacular of the peasants with high-caste literary Bengali, which had fallen into disuse under Muslim rulers, who favoured Urdu. The Hindus took to Bengali with enthusiasm, seeing it as a means toward reasserting their

cultural heritage, and the 19th century saw a renaissance in Bengali literature. Author Rabindranath Tagore gave Bengali literature kudos when he won the Nobel Prize for literature (see p32).

It wasn't until Partition, and the departure of most of the Hindu ruling class, that Bangladeshi intellectuals felt the need for Bengali as a means of defining their culture and nationalism.

There is a much lower proportion of English-speakers in Bangladesh than in India. It's surprising how many conversations you can have in which you think that you're being understood. English has lapsed for three main reasons: there aren't distinct regional languages which make a lingua franca (common language) necessary; the symbolic importance of Bengali in the independence movement; and the many weaknesses in the public education system. In recent years, however, the value of English has risen considerably, especially if the number of colleges and schools advertising tuition is anything to go by.

Making the effort to learn some Bengali will not only be greatly appreciated; at times it's your only hope. You'll find that most billboards and street signs are written in Bengali script only.

Lonely Planet's *Hindi, Urdu & Bengali Phrasebook* provides a far more in-depth guide to the language, with a selection of useful words and phrases to cover most travel situations. There are a few Bengali phrasebooks available in Dhaka in the New Market bookshops, although the standard of English in some isn't very good. The Heed language centre in Dhaka produces a useful Bengali-English/English-Bengali dictionary and a basic course instruction booklet. See Courses (p159) in the Directory chapter for information on learning Bengali while you're in the country.

PRONUNCIATION

Pronunciation of Bengali is made difficult by the fact that the language includes a variety of subtle sounds with no equivalents in English.

Vowels

Most Bengali vowel sounds are very similar to English ones. The most important thing is to focus on the length of vowels (like the difference between the sounds **a** and **aa**).

a	as the 'u' in 'run'
q	as in 'tap'
aa	as in 'rather'
ai	as in 'aisle'
ay	as in 'may'
e	as in 'red'
ee	as in 'bee'
i	as in 'bit'
o	as in 'shot'
oh	as in 'both'
oy	as in 'boy'
u	as in 'put'
ui	as in 'quick'

Consonant Sounds

In Bengali there's an important distinction between 'aspirated' and 'unaspirated' consonants, which are produced with or without a puff of air respectively; you'll get the idea if you hold your hand in front of your mouth to feel your breath and say 'pit' (where the 'p' is aspirated) and 'spit' (where it's unaspirated). In this language guide we've used the apostrophe (eg **b'**) to show aspirated consonants – pronounce these as if there's a strong 'h' sound after them.

The other feature that will be unfamiliar to English-speakers is the 'retroflex' consonant. To produce the sound you bend your tongue up and back so the tip touches the ridge on the roof of the mouth behind the teeth. In this language guide the retroflex variants of **d**, **r** and **t** are represented by **ḍ**, **ṛ** and **ṭ** respectively.

The sounds **v**, **w** and **z** are only found in words taken from English, and are pronounced the same as in English.

Word Stress

The pronunciation guides included in this book show words divided into syllables with dots (eg *bo·ch'ohr* 'year') to help you pronounce them. Word stress in Bengali is very subtle, and varies in different regions of the Indian subcontinent. Stress normally falls on the first syllable (eg *b'a-loh* 'good'). Just follow our pronunciation guides – the stressed syllable is always in italics.

ACHA

Acha, the subcontinent's ambiguous 'OK/ Yes/I see' is used widely, but the local slang equivalent is *tik assay* or just *tik*. The words *ji* or *ha* are more positive – if the rickshaw-wallah answers *acha* to your offered price, expect problems at the other end; if it's *tik* or *ji* he's unlikely to demand more money.

ACCOMMODATION

Where's a ...?

... কোথায়?

... koh-ṭ'a-e

guesthouse

গেস্ট হাউস gest ha-us

hotel

হোটেল hoh-tel

resthouse (government-run guesthouse)

রেস্ট হাউস rest ha-us

tourist bungalow

টুরিস্ট বাংলো tu-risṭ baang-loh

youth hostel

ইউথ হস্টেল ee-ut' hos-tel

What's the address?

ঠিকানাটা কি?

ṭ'i-ka-na-ta ki

I'd like to book a room, please.

আমি একটা রুম বুক করতে চাই, প্লিজ।

aa-mi qk-ta rum buk kohr-ṭe chai pleez

Do you have a ... room?

আপনার কি ... রুম আছে?

aa-p-nar ki ... rum aa-ch'e

double

ডবল

do-bohl

single

সিংগল

sin-gel

How much is it per ...?

প্রতি ... কত?

proh-ṭi ... ko-ṭoh

person

জনে

jo-ne

night

রাতে

raa-ṭe

week

সপ্তাহে

shop-ṭa-he

May I see it?

আমি কি এটা দেখতে পারি?

aa-mi ki e-ta dek-ṭe pa-ri

I'll take it.

আমি এটা নিব।

aa-mi e-ta ni-boh

heating

হিটার

hi-tar

hot water

গরম পানি

go-rohm pa-ni

running water

কলের পানি

ko-ler pa-ni

The ... doesn't work.

... কাজ করে না।

... kaaj koh-re na

air conditioner এয়ারকন্ডিশনার e-aar-kon-di-shoh-nar**fan** ফ্যান fan
toilet টয়লেট toy-let**Can I leave my bags here?**

আমার ব্যাগ কি এখানে রেখে যেতে পারি?

aa-mar bag ki e-k'a-ne re-k'e je-te paa-ri

I'm leaving now.

আমি এখন যাচ্ছি।

aa-mi q-k'ohn jach-ch'i

I had a great stay, thank you.

আমার খুব ভাল লেগেছে, ধন্যবাদ।

aa-mar k'ub b'a-loh le-ge-ch'e d'ohn-noh-bad

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

Muslim men usually shake hands when greeting, but women generally just accompany their greeting with a smile. Hindu men and women greet others by joining the palms of their hands together and holding them close to the chest as they slightly bow the head and say their greeting.

Men might hear people greet them with *ba-ha-dur*, an honorific implying that you're wise and wealthy and should pay top price. Married or otherwise 'respectable' women might be addressed as *be-gohm*, roughly the equivalent of 'Madam'. However, in most situations you'll be referred to as *bohn-d'u*, meaning 'friend'.

'Please' and 'Thank you' are rarely used in Bengali. Instead, these sentiments are expressed indirectly in polite conversation. The absence of these shouldn't be misread as rudeness.

If you want to thank someone, you may use the Bengali equivalent for 'Thank you (very much)', (*o-nek*) *d'oh-noh-baad*, or, alternatively, pay them a compliment.

Hello. (Muslim greeting)

আসসালাম ওয়ালাইকুম। as-sa-lam wa-lai-kum

Hello. (Muslim response)

ওয়ালাইকুম আসসালাম। wa-lai-kum as-sa-lam

Hello. (Hindu greeting and response)

নমস্কার। no-mohsh-kar

See you later.

পরে দেখা হবে। po-re dq-k'a ho-be

Goodbye/Good night. (Muslim)

আল্লাহ হাফেজ। al-laa ha-fez

Goodbye/Good night. (Hindu)

নমস্কার। no-mosh-kar

Yes.

হ্যাঁ। haṅg

No.

না। naa

Please.

প্লিজ। pleez

Thank you (very much).

(অনেক) ধন্যবাদ। (o-nek) d'oh-noh-baad

Excuse me. (eg before a request)

শুনুন। shu-nun

Excuse me. (to get past)

একটু দেখি। ek-tu de-k'i

Sorry.

সরি। so-ri

Forgive me.

মাফ করবেন। maf kohr-ben

How are you?

কেমন আছেন? ka-mohn aa-ch'en

Fine, and you?

ভাল, আপনি? b'a-loh aap-ni

What's your name?

আপনার নাম কি? aap-nar naam ki

My name is ...

আমার নাম ... aa-mar naam ...

I'm pleased to meet you.

আপনার সাথে পরিচিত aap-nar sha-t'e poh-ri-chi-toh

হয়ে খুশি হয়েছি। hoh-e k'u-shi hoh-e-ch'i

A pleasure to meet you, too.

আমিও। aa-mi-o

Two verbs that will undoubtedly come in very handy are *a-ch'e* (there is, has), and *lag-be* (need). You can ask *k'a-na a-ch'e?* (Is there food?) or *b'ang-ti a-ch'e?* (Do you have change?). The negative form of *a-ch'e* is simply *nai*. Saying *bak-sheesh nai* means you don't have any baksheesh to give. You can say *pa-ni lag-be* (lit: water is needed), or say *lag-be na* (lit: don't need) to turn down any unwanted offer.

DIRECTIONS**Where's a/the (station)?**

(স্টেশন) কোথায়? (ste-shohn) koh-t'ai

What's the address?

ঠিকানা কি? t'i-kaa-na ki

How far is it?

এটা কত দূর? e-ta ko-toh dur

How do I get there?

ওখানে কি ভাবে যাব? oh-k'a-ne ki b'a-be ja-boh

Can you show me (on the map)?

আমাকে (ম্যাপে) aa-ma-ke (mq-pe)

দেখাতে পারেন? dq-k'a-te paa-ren

SIGNS

ভিতর	Enter
বাহির	Exit
ধূমপান নিষেদ	No Smoking
হোটেল	Hotel
বাস	Bus
শৌচাগার	Toilets
মহিলা	Ladies (also bus seats reserved for women)
পুরুষ	Men
পুলিশ স্টেশন	Police Station
হাসপাতাল	Hospital

Cities

ঢাকা	Dhaka
খুলনা	Khulna
রাজশাহি	Rajshahi
সিলেট	Sylhet
চট্টগ্রাম	Chittagong
বরিশাল	Barisal

by করে	... koh-re
bus	বাসে	ba-se
rickshaw	রিকশা	rik-sha
taxi	ট্যাক্সি	tak-si
train	ট্রেনে	tre-ne
on foot	পায়ে হেটে	paa-e he-te

Turn টার্ন করবেন	... taarn kohr-ben
at the corner	কর্নারে	kor-na-re
at the traffic lights	ট্র্যাফিক লাইটে	trafik lai-te
left	বামে	baa-me
right	ডানে	daa-ne

near-এর কাছে	...-er ka-ch'e
on the corner	কর্নারে	kor-na-re
straight ahead	সোজা	shoh-ja
there	ঐ যে	oy je
north	উত্তর	ut-tohr
east	পূর্ব	pur-boh
south	দক্ষিণ	dohk'-k'in
west	পশ্চিম	pohsh-chim

HEALTH**Where's the nearest ...?**

কাছাকাছি ... কোথায়?
ka-ch'a-ka-ch'i ... koh-t'a-e

doctor

ডাক্তার *ḍak-tar*

hospital

হাসপাতাল *hash-pa-tal*

(night) pharmacist

(রাতে খোলা)
ঔষধের দোকান *(raa-t'e k'oh-la) oh-shud'er doh-kan*

I need a doctor (who speaks English).

আমার একজন ডাক্তার লাগবে (যিনি ইংরেজিতে কথা বলতে পারেন।)
aa-mar qk-john ḍak-tar laag-be (ji-ni ing-re-ji-t'e ko-t'a boh-l'e paa-re)

I'm sick.

আমি অসুস্থ। *aa-mi o-shush-t'oh*

It hurts here.

এখানে ব্যথা করছে। *e-k'a-ne bq-t'a kohr-ch'e*

I've been vomiting.

আমার বমি হচ্ছিল। *aa-mar boh-mi hoh-ch'i-loh*

I have (a/an) ...

আমার (একটা) ... *aa-mar (qk-ta) ...*
আছে। *aa-che*

asthma

এ্যাজমা *qz-ma*

(a) cough

কাশি *ka-shi*

diabetes

ডাইবেটিস *ḍai-be-tis*

diarrhoea

ডাইরিয়া *ḍai-ri-a*

fever

জ্বর *jor*

headache

মাথা ব্যথা *ma-t'a bq-t'a*

nausea

বমি ভাব *boh-mi b'ab*

sore throat

গলা ব্যথা *go-la bq-t'a*

EMERGENCIES**Help!**

বাচান! *ba-cha-o*

I'm lost.

আমি হারিয়ে গেছি। *aa-mi ha-ri-ye gq-ch'i*

Go away!

চলে যান! *choh-le jan*

Where are the toilets?

টয়লেট কোথায়? *toy-let koh-t'a-e*

It's an emergency.

এটা একটা এমার্জেন্সি।

e-ta qk-ta e-mar-jen-si

Could you please help?

একটু সাহায্য করতে পারেন?

ek-tu sha-haj-joh kohr-t'e paa-ren

Can I use your phone?

আপনার ফোন ব্যবহার করতে পারি কি?

aap-nar fohn bq-boh-har kohr-t'e pa-ri ki

Call ...!

... ডাক্বেন! *... da-ken*

an ambulance

এ্যাম্বুলেন্স *qm-bu-lens*

a doctor

ডাক্তার *ḍak-tar*

the police

পুলিশ *pu-lish*

I'm allergic to ...

আমার ... -এ এলার্জি আছে।

aa-mar ... -e q-lar-ji aa-ch'e

antibiotics	এ্যান্টিবায়োটিক	<i>qn-ti-bai-o-tik</i>
aspirin	এ্যাসপিরিন	<i>qs-pi-rin</i>
penicillin	পেনিসিলিন	<i>pe-ni-si-lin</i>
antiseptic	এ্যান্টিসেপটিক	<i>qn-ti-sep-tik</i>
condoms	কন্ডম	<i>kon-dohm</i>
contraceptives	কন্ট্রাসেপটিভ	<i>kon-tra-sep-tiv</i>
insect repellent	ইনসেক্ট রিপেলেন্ট	<i>in-sekt ri-pe-lent</i>
painkillers	ব্যথাহার ঔষধ	<i>bq-t'ar o-shud'</i>

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES**Do you speak (English)?**

আপনি কি (ইংরেজি) বলত পারেন?

*aap-ni ki (ing-re-ji) bohl-te paa-ren***Yes, I understand.**

হ্যাঁ, আমি বুঝত পারছি।

*hang aa-mi buj-te paa-ch'i***No, I don't understand.**

না, আমি বুঝত পারছি না।

*na aa-mi buj-te paa-ch'i na***I don't speak (Bengali).**

আমি (বাংলা) বলত পারি না।

*aa-mi (bang-la) bohl-te paa-ri na***I can't read Bengali characters.**

আমি বাংলা অক্ষর পড়ত পারি না।

*aa-mi bang-la ok-k'ohr pohr-te paa-ri na***What does 'ach'-ch'a' mean?**

‘আচ্ছা’ মান কি?

*ach'-ch'a maa-ne ki***Could you please ...?**

... প্লিজ?

... pleez

repeat that

আবার বলন

*aa-bar boh-len***speak more slowly**

আরা ধীর বলন

*aa-roh d'i-re boh-len***write it down**

লিখ দন

*li-k'e den***NUMBERS**

Counting up to 20 is easy, but after that it becomes complicated, as the terms do not follow sequentially. In Bengali 21 isn't *bish-ek* or *ek-bish* as you might expect, but *ek-ush*; 45 is actually *poy-tal-ish*, but the simpler *pach-chohl-ish* is understood.

0	০	shun-noh
1	১	ak
2	২	dui
3	৩	teen
4	৪	chaar

5	৫	paach
6	৬	ch'oy
7	৭	shaat
8	৮	aat
9	৯	noy
10	১০	dosh
11	১১	q-gaa-roh
12	১২	baa-roh
13	১৩	tq-roh
14	১৪	chohd-doh
15	১৫	poh-ne-roh
16	১৬	shoh-loh
17	১৭	sho-te-roh
18	১৮	aat'-aa-roh
19	১৯	u-nish
20	২০	beesh
30	৩০	ti-rish
40	৪০	chohl-ish
50	৫০	pon-chaash
60	৬০	shaat
70	৭০	shoh-t'ur
80	৮০	aa-shi
90	৯০	nohb-boh-i
100	১০০	ak shoh
200	২০০	dui shoh
1000	১০০০	ak haa-jaar
100,000	১০০০০০	ak laak'
1 million	১০০০০০০	dosh laak'
10 million	১০০০০০০০	ak koh-ti

SHOPPING & SERVICES

For many words, such as 'hotel' and 'post office', the English word will be understood.

Where's a/the ...?

... কোথায়?

... koh-t'a-e

bank

ব্যাংক

bank

department store

ডিপার্টমেন্ট স্টোর

di-part-ment stohr

khadi shop

খাদির দোকান

k'a-dir doh-kan

market

বাজার

baa-jar

tourist office

পর্যটন কেন্দ্র

pohr-joh-tohn ken-droh

Where can I buy (a padlock)?

(একটা তালা) কোথায় কিনতে পাওয়া যাবে?
(*ak-ta ta-la*) koh-t'a-e kin-te pa-wa ja-be

I'm just looking.

আমি দেখছি।

aa-mi dek-ch'i

I'd like to buy (an adaptor plug).

একটা (এডাপ্টার প্লাগ) কিনতে চাই।

qk-ta (ə-dʌp-tar plæg) kin-tə chai

How much is it?

এটার দাম কত?

e-tar dam ko-tʰ

Can you write down the price?

দামটা কি লিখে দিতে পারেন?

dam-ta ki li-k'e di-tə paa-ren

Can I look at it?

এটা দেখতে পারি?

e-ta dek-tə paa-ri

That's too expensive.

বেশী দাম।

be-shi dam

Can you lower the price?

দাম কমান।

dam ko-man

I'll give you (30 taka).

আমি (তিরিশ টাকা) দিব।

aa-mi (tʃi-rish ta-ka) di-boh

Do you accept ...?

আপনি কি ... নেন?

aap-ni ki ... nen

credit cards

ক্রেডিট কার্ড

kre-dit kard

debit cards

ডেবিট কার্ড

dē-bit kard

travellers cheques

ট্রাভেলার্স চেক

trq-ve-lars chek

TIME & DATE

Bengalis use the 12-hour clock. There's no such concept as 'am' or 'pm' – the time of day is indicated by adding *shok-aal* (morning), *du-pur* (afternoon) or *raat* (night) before the time. To tell the time, add the suffix *-ta* to the ordinal number which indicates the hour.

What time is it? কয়টা বাজে? *koy-ta baa-je*

It's (10) o'clock. (দশটা) বাজে। *(dosh-ta) baa-je*

Five past বেজে পাঁচ। *... be-je pach*

Quarter past ... সোয়া ... *shoh-aa ...*

Half past ... সাড়ে ... *shaa-tə ...*

Quarter to ... পৌনে ... *poh-ne ...*

At what time ...? কটার সময় ...? *ko-tar sho-moy ...*

At (10)am. সকাল (দশটা)। *sho-kaal (dosh-ta)*

today আজকে *aa-j-ke*

yesterday ... গতকাল ... *go-tʰoh-kaal ...*

tomorrow ... আগামিকাল ... *aa-ga-mi-kaal ...*

morning সকাল *sho-kaal*

afternoon দুপুর *du-pur*

evening বিকাল *bee-kaal*

Monday সোমবার *sohm-baar*

Tuesday মঙ্গলবার *mohng-gohl-baar*

Wednesday বুধবার *bud'-baar*

Thursday বৃহস্পতিবার *bri-hosh-poh-tʃi-baar*

Friday শুক্রবার *shuk-roh-baar*

Saturday শনিবার *shoh-ni-baar*

Sunday রবিবার *roh-bi-baar*

January জানুয়ারি *jaa-nu-aa-ri*

February ফেব্রুয়ারি *feb-ru-aa-ri*

March মার্চ *maarch*

April এপ্রিল *ep-reel*

May মে *me*

June জুন *jun*

July জুলাই *ju-lai*

August আগস্ট *aa-gohst*

September সেপ্টেম্বর *sep-tem-baar*

October অক্টোবর *ok-toh-baar*

November নভেম্বর *no-b'em-baar*

December ডিসেম্বর *di-sem-baar*

TRANSPORT**Public Transport****Which ... goes to (Comilla)?**

কোন ... (কুমিল্লা) যায়?

kohn ... (ku-mil-laa) ja-e

bus বাস *bas*

train ট্রেন *tren*

tram ট্রাম *trām*

When's the ... (bus)?

... (বাস) কখন?

... (bas) ko-k'ohn

first প্রথম *proh-t'ohm*

next পরের *po-ter*

last শেষ *shesh*

What time does it leave?

কখন ছাড়বে? *ko-k'ohn ch'aa-je*

How long will it be delayed?

কত দেরি হবে? *ko-toh de-ri ho-be*

Is this seat available?

এই সিট কি খালি? *ay seet ki K'aa-lee*

Where do I buy a ticket?

কোথায় টিকেট কিনবো? *koh-tʃ'a-e ti-keet kin-boh*

Where's the booking office for foreigners?

বিদেশীদের জন্য *bi-de-shi-der john-noh*

বুকিং অফিস কোথায়? *bu-king o-feesh koh-tʃ'a-e*

Do I need to change train?

আমাকে কি চেঞ্জ *aa-maa-ke ki chenj*

করতে হবে ট্রেন? *koh-rʃe ho-be tren*

How long does the trip take?

যেতে কতক্ষণ *je-tə ko-tohk-k'ohn*

লাগবে? *laa-ge*

A ... ticket (to Dhaka).

(ঢাকার) জন্য একটা ... টিকেট।
(d'aa-kaar) john-noh qk-ta ... ti-ket

1st-class	ফাস্ট ক্লাস	farst klaas
2nd-class	সেকেন্ড ক্লাস	se-kend klaas
one-way	ওয়ানওয়ে	wan-way
return	রিটার্ন	ri-tarn
student	ছাত্র	ch'at-roh

I'd like a/an ... seat.

আমাকে একটা ... aa-ma-ke qk-ta ...

nonsmoking	ধূমপান নিষেধ এলাকায়	d'um-paan ni-shed' e-la-ka-e
smoking	ধূমপান এলাকায়	d'um-paan e-la-ka-e

What's the next stop?

পরের স্টপ কি?
po-rer stop ki

Please tell me when we get to (Sylhet).

(সিলেট) আসলে আমাকে বলবেন, প্লিজ।
(si-let) aash-le aa-maa-ke boh-l-ben pleez

I'd like to get off at (Mongla).

আমি (মঙ্গলাতে) নামতে চাই।
aa-mi (mong-laa-te) naam-te chai

Where's the queue for female passengers?

মহিলা প্যাসেঞ্জারদের লাইন কোথায়?
moh-hi-la pq-sen-jar-der la-in koh-t'a-e

Where are the seats for female passengers?

মহিলা প্যাসেঞ্জারদের সিট কোথায়?
moh-hi-la pq-sen-jar-der seet koh-t'a-e

... bus	... বাস	... bas
city	শহর	sho-hohr
express	এক্সপ্রেস	eks-pres
intercity	ইন্টারসিটি	in-tar-see-ti
local	লোকাল	loh-kaal
ordinary	অর্ডিনারি	o-di-naa-ri

Is this taxi available?

এই ট্যাক্সি খালি? ay tqk-si k'aa-li

Please put the meter on.

প্লিজ মিটার লাগান। pleez mee-tar laa-gan

How much is it to ...?

... যেতে কত লাগবে? ... je-te ko-toh laag-be

Please take me to this address.

আমাকে এই ঠিকানায় aa-ma-ke ay t'i-kaa-nai
নিয়ে যান। ni-ye jaan

Private Transport**I'd like to hire a/an ...**

আমি একটা ... ভাড়া করতে চাই।
aa-mi qk-ta ... b'a-ra kohr-te chai

4WD

ফোর হুইল ড্রাইভ fohr weel draiv

bicycle

সাইকেল sai-kel

car

গাড়ি gaa-ri

motorbike

মটরসাইকেল mo-tohr-sai-kel

Is this the road to (Rangamati)?

এটা কি (রাঙ্গামাটির) রাস্তা?
e-ta ki (raang-a-maa-tir) raas-ta

Where's a petrol station?

পেট্রোল স্টেশন কোথায়?
pet-rohl ste-shohn koh-t'a-e

Please fill it up.

ভর্তি করে দেন, প্লিজ।
b'ohr-ti koh-re dan pleez

I'd like (20) litres.

আমার (বিশ) লিটার লাগবে।
aa-mar (beesh) li-tar laag-be

diesel

ডিজেল

di-zel

regular

পেট্রোল

pet-rohl

unleaded

অকটেন

ok-ten (octane)

I need a mechanic.

আমার একজন মেকানিক লাগবে।
aa-mar qk-john me-kaa-nik laag-be

The car/motorbike has broken down at (Sylhet).

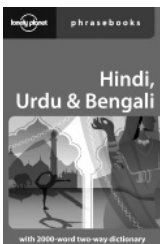
গাড়ি/মটরসাইকেল (সিলেট) নষ্ট হয়ে গেছে।
gaa-ri/mo-tohr-sai-kel (si-let) nosh-toh hoh-e qq-ch'e

I have a flat tyre.

আমার গাড়ির একটা চাকা পাল্শচার হয়ে গেছে।
aa-mar gaa-ri qk-ta chaa-ka pank-char hoh-e qq-ch'e

I've run out of petrol.

আমার পেট্রোল শেষ হয়ে গেছে।
aa-mar pet-rohl shesh hoh-e qq-ch'e



Also available from Lonely Planet:
Hindi, Urdu & Bengali Phrasebook

Glossary

Adivasis – tribal people

baby taxi – mini auto-rickshaw

baksheesh – donation, tip or bribe, depending on the context

Bangla – the national language of Bangladesh (see *Bengali*); also the new name for the Indian state of West Bengal

bangla – architectural style associated with the Pre-Mauryan and Mauryan period (312–232 BC); exemplified by a bamboo-thatched hut with a distinctively curved roof

baras – ancient houseboats

bawalis – timber workers in the Sundarbans

Bengali – the national language of Bangladesh, where it is also known as Bangla, and the official language of the state of Bangla (formerly West Bengal) in India

BIWTC – Bangladesh Inland Waterway Transport Corporation

BNP – Bangladesh Nationalist Party

BRAC – Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee

BRTC – Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation

cha – tea, usually served with milk and sugar

chair coach – modern bus with adjustable seats and lots of leg room

char – a river or delta island made of silt; highly fertile but highly susceptible to flooding and erosion

DC – District Commissioner

Eid – Muslim holiday

ghat – steps or landing on a river

hammam – bath house

haors – wetlands

hartals – strikes, ranging from local to national

jamdani – ornamental loom-embroidered muslin or silk

jor bangla – twin hut architectural style

kantha – traditional indigo-dyed muslin

khyang – Buddhist temple

kuthi – factories

madhu – honey; also *mau*

mahavihara – large monastery

maidan – open grassed area in a town or city, used as a parade ground during the Raj

mandir – temple

mau – honey; also *madhu*

maualis – honey-gatherers in the Sundarbans

mazars – graves

mela – festival

mihrab – niche in a mosque positioned to face Mecca; Muslims face in this direction when they pray

mishuk – smaller, less-colourful version of a baby taxi

mistris – rickshaw makers

mohajons – rickshaw- or taxi-fleet owners (also known as *maliks*)

Mughal – the Muslim dynasty of Indian emperors from Babur to Aurangzeb (16th–18th century)

mustan – Mafia-style bosses who demand, and receive, payment from baby-taxi drivers, roadside vendors and people living on public land

nakshi kanthas – embroidered quilts

nava-ratna – nine towered; used to describe certain mosques

nawab – Muslim prince

paisa – unit of currency; there are 100 paisa in a taka

Parjatan – the official Bangladesh-government tourist organisation

Raj – also called the British Raj; the period of British government in the Indian Subcontinent, roughly from the mid-18th century to the mid-20th century

raj – rule or sovereignty

raja – ruler, landlord or king

rajbari – Raj-era palace built by a zamindar

Ramzan – Bengali name for Ramadan

rekha – buildings with a square sanctum on a raised platform

rest house – government-owned guesthouse

rickshaw – small, three-wheeled bicycle-driven passenger vehicle

rickshaw-wallah – rickshaw driver

Rocket – paddle steamer

sadhus – holy men

salwar kameez – a long, dress-like tunic (*kameez*) worn by women over a pair of baggy trousers (*salwar*)

shankhari – Hindu artisan

Shi'ia – Islamic sect that sees the authority of Mohammed as continuing through Ali, his son-in-law

Shiva – Hindu god; the destroyer, the creator

stupa – Buddhist religious monument

Sufi – ascetic Muslim mystic

sulob – upper-2nd class on a train (with reserved seating)

Sunni – school of Islamic thought that sees the authority of Mohammed as continuing through Abu Bakr, the former governor of Syria

taka – currency of Bangladesh

tea estate – terraced hillside where tea is grown; also tea garden

tempo – shared auto-rickshaw

vihara – monastery

zamindar – landlord; also the name of the feudal-landowner system itself

zila – district