

Kolkata (Calcutta)



Simultaneously noble and squalid, cultured and desperate, Kolkata is a daily festival of human existence. And it's all played out before your very eyes on teeming streets where not an inch of space is wasted. By its old spelling, Calcutta, India's second-biggest city conjures up images of human suffering to most Westerners. But Bengalis have long been infuriated by one-sided depictions of their vibrant capital. Kolkata is locally regarded as the intellectual and cultural capital of the nation. Several of India's great 19th- and 20th-century heroes were Kolkatans, including guru-philosopher Ramakrishna, Nobel Prize-winning poet Rabindranath Tagore and celebrated film director Satyajit Ray. Dozens of venues showcase Bengali dance, poetry, art, music, film and theatre. And while poverty certainly remains in-your-face, the dapper Bengali gentry continue to frequent grand old gentlemen's clubs, back horses at the Calcutta Racetrack and play soothing rounds of golf at some of India's finest courses.

As the former capital of British India, Kolkata retains a feast of dramatic colonial architecture, with more than a few fine buildings in photogenic states of semi-collapse. The city still has many slums but is also developing dynamic new-town suburbs, a rash of air-conditioned shopping malls and some of the best restaurants in India. This is a fabulous place to sample the mild, fruity tang of Bengali cuisine and share the city's passion for sweets.

Friendlier than India's other mega-cities, Kolkata is really a city you 'feel' more than just visit. But don't come between May and September unless you're prepared for a very serious drenching.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Be awed by the magnificent colonial folly that is the **Victoria Memorial** (p492)
- Enjoy bizarre random encounters while strolling between the faded colonial buildings and assorted religious monuments around **BBD Bagh** (p497)
- Savour lipsmackingly authentic Bengali cuisine at modest **Bhojohari Manna** (p507) or cosily homy **Kewpies** (p507)
- Contrast the urbane universalism on display at **Tagore's House** (p501) and the **Ramakrishna Centre** (p501) with the gruesome sensual fascination of **Kali Temple** (p499)
- Consider **volunteering** (p502) to help the destitute after a humbling visit to the rubbish-heap 'homes' around former **Chinatown** (p498)



HISTORY

In the Hindu epics, the God Shiva was understandably dismayed to happen upon the charred corpse of Sati, his newly wed wife (an incarnation of Kali). However, his decision to destroy the world in retribution was considered somewhat of an over-reaction by fellow deities. Vishnu interceded to stop Shiva's 'dance of destruction', but in so doing dismembered Sati's cadaver into 51 pieces. These gory chunks landed at widely disbursed points across India. One of her toes fell at Kalikata (now Kalighat, p499), where the site became honoured by a much revered temple.

Famed as Kalikata/Kalighat might have been, the place was still a fairly typical rural backwater when British merchant Job Charnock showed up in 1686. Charnock reckoned the Hooghly River bend would make an ideal settlement, and by 1698 the villages of Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Kalikata had been formally signed over to the British East India Company. The British thereupon created a miniature version of London-on-Hooghly, with stately buildings, wide boulevards, English churches and grand formal gardens. The grand illusion vanished abruptly at Calcutta's frayed edges where Indians servicing the Raj lived in cramped, overcrowded bastis (slums).

The most notable hiccup in the city's meteoric rise came in 1756, when Siraj-ud-Daula, the nawab of nearby Murshidabad, recaptured the city. Dozens of members of the colonial aristocracy were imprisoned in a cramped room beneath Fort William. By morning, around 40 of them were dead from suffocation. The British press exaggerated numbers, drumming up moral outrage back home: the legend of the 'Black Hole of Calcutta' was born.

The following year, Clive of India retook Calcutta for Britain and made peace with the nawab, who promptly sided with the French and was soundly defeated at the Battle of Plassey (now Palashi). A stronger fort was built and the town became British India's official capital, though well into the late 18th century one could still hunt tigers in the bamboo forests around where Sudder St lies today.

The late 19th century Bengali Renaissance movement saw a great cultural reawakening among middle-class Calcuttans. This was further galvanised by the massively unpopular 1905 division of Bengal, sowing the seeds of the Indian Independence movement. Bengal was reunited in 1911, but the British promptly

FAST FACTS

- Population: 14.7 million (for whole conurbation)
- Area: 185 sq km
- Telephone code: ☎ 033
- Main language: Bengali
- When to go: October to March

transferred their colonial capital to less troublesome Delhi.

Initially loss of political power had little effect on Calcutta's economic status. However, the impact of partition was devastating. While West Pakistan and Punjab saw a fairly equal (if bloody) exchange of populations, migration in Bengal was almost entirely one way. Around four million Hindu refugees from East Bengal arrived, choking Calcutta's already overpopulated bustees. For a period, people really were dying of hunger in the streets, creating Calcutta's abiding image of abject poverty. No sooner had these refugees been absorbed than a second vast wave arrived during the 1971 India-Pakistan War.

After India's partition the port of Calcutta was hit very hard by the loss of its main natural hinterland, now behind closed Pakistan-Bangladesh borders. Labour unrest spiralled out of control, while the city's dominant party (Communist Party of India) spent most of its efforts attacking the feudal system of land ownership. Attempts to set strict rent controls and residents' rights were well intentioned but have since backfired. Kolkata rents remain amongst the lowest in India but when tenants pay as little as Rs 1 a month, landlords have zero interest in maintaining or upgrading properties. The sad result is that many fine old buildings are literally crumbling before one's eyes.

Since 2001 Calcutta has officially adopted the more phonetic spelling, Kolkata. Around the same time the city administration implemented a new business-friendly attitude that is now encouraging a very noticeable economic resurgence.

ORIENTATION

Kolkata sprawls outwards from the holy chocolate-sludge that is the Hooghly River. Apart from the gigantic Howrah (Haora) train station, most points of interest lie on the east bank.

Administrative Kolkata takes up several blocks of colonial-era buildings around BBD Bagh. North of here lanes are narrow and intriguingly vibrant. Well south in Alipore and Gariahat are the wealthier districts of the Bengali upper classes. Long-distance bus stations are around the top of a vast park called the Maidan. Budget travellers head for the nearby Sudder St area, Kolkata's equivalent of Bangkok's Khao San Rd. Here you'll find backpacker cafés, moneychangers, helpful travel agencies and Kolkata's savviest beggars. Upmarket dining and boutiques are most prevalent around Park, Camac and Elgin Sts. The central business district is around Shakespeare Sarani but corporate offices are increasingly relocating to Sector 5 of Salt Lake City, a new-town area that starts around several kilometres northeast of the centre.

Maps

Hawkers sell various city maps. None are perfect but the TTK *Road Guide to Kolkata* (Rs 75) is clearer than the IMS version. **Catchcal** (www.catchcal.com/map/map.html) has a searchable online map. The **Geographical Survey of India** (Map p494; ☎ 22475731; 13 Wood St; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri) sells Rs 12 city maps. Very bureaucratic procedure.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Secondhand books are sold from street stalls lining College St between MG and Colootola Rds (mostly academic) and from several small bookshops (p494) around the junction of Sudder and Mirza Ghalib Sts (traveller oriented), such as **Bookland** (Sudder St).

Other top bookshops:

Classic Books/Earthcare Books (Map p494; ☎ 22296551; www.earthcarebooks.com; 10 Middleton

St) Charming family publisher-bookshop with strengths in environmentalism, politics, spirituality and women's issues. Behind Drive-Inn

Crossword (Map p500; ☎ 22836502; www.crosswordbookstores.com; 8 Elgin Rd; ☎ 10.30am-8.30pm) Large chain bookshop with café. Sells *Times Food Guide*.

Oxford Book Shop (Map p494; ☎ 22297662; www.oxfordbookstore.com; 17 Park St; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11am-8pm Sun; ☎) Excellent bookshop with browse-seating and café (coffee Rs 40 to 60). Appealing line-sketch postcards. Stocks Lonely Planet guides.

Seagull Bookstore (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24765865; www.seagullindia.com; 31A SP Mukherjee Rd) Academic bookshop with particular strengths on regional politics. Enter from the lane leading to Indira cinema.

Internet Access

Internet centres all over town mostly offer excellent connection speeds for as little as Rs 10 per hour. Reliable choices:

Cyberia (Map p494; 8 Kyd St; per hr Rs 10; ☎ 8.30am-10pm) Hourly minimum fee.

DirectWay (Map p496; 3 Khetra Das Rd; per 90 min Rs 30; ☎ 11am-8pm) Cramped.

Hotline/Saree Palace (Map p494; 7 Sudder St; per hr Rs 15; ☎ 8.30am-midnight) Helpful, pleasant environment and long hours, with travel services available and fabrics for sale.

I-way (Map p494; 59B Park St; per hr Rs 30; ☎ 10.30am-9.30pm) Spacious, with super-fast connections and high powered AC.

Junction 96 (Map p500; Sarat Bose Rd; per hr Rs 15)

Netfreaks (Map p494; 2/1 Sudder St; per hr Rs 20; ☎ 9.30am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun)

Internet Resources

Useful websites on Kolkata include www.catchcal.com, www.kolkata-india.com, www.kolkatahub.com, www.kolkatainformation.com and www.calcuttaweb.com.

FESTIVALS IN KOLKATA

Dover Lane Music Conference (late Jan) Indian classical music at Nazrul Mancha in Rabindra Sarovar park.

Kolkata Boi Mela (www.kolkatabookfaironline.com; late Jan/early Feb) Asia's biggest book fair.

Saraswati Puja (early Feb) Prayers for educational success, all dressed in yellow.

Rath Yatra (Jun/Jul) Major Krishna chariot festival similar to the Puri equivalent (p643).

Durga Puja (www.durgapujas.com; Oct) Kolkata's biggest festival. Gaudily painted idols of the 10-armed goddess Durga and entourage (see p501) are displayed in fabulously ornate pavilions (*pandals*) for five days of veneration. Then they're thrown into the Hooghly River amid singing, water throwing, fireworks and indescribable traffic congestion. Afterwards half the city goes on holiday.

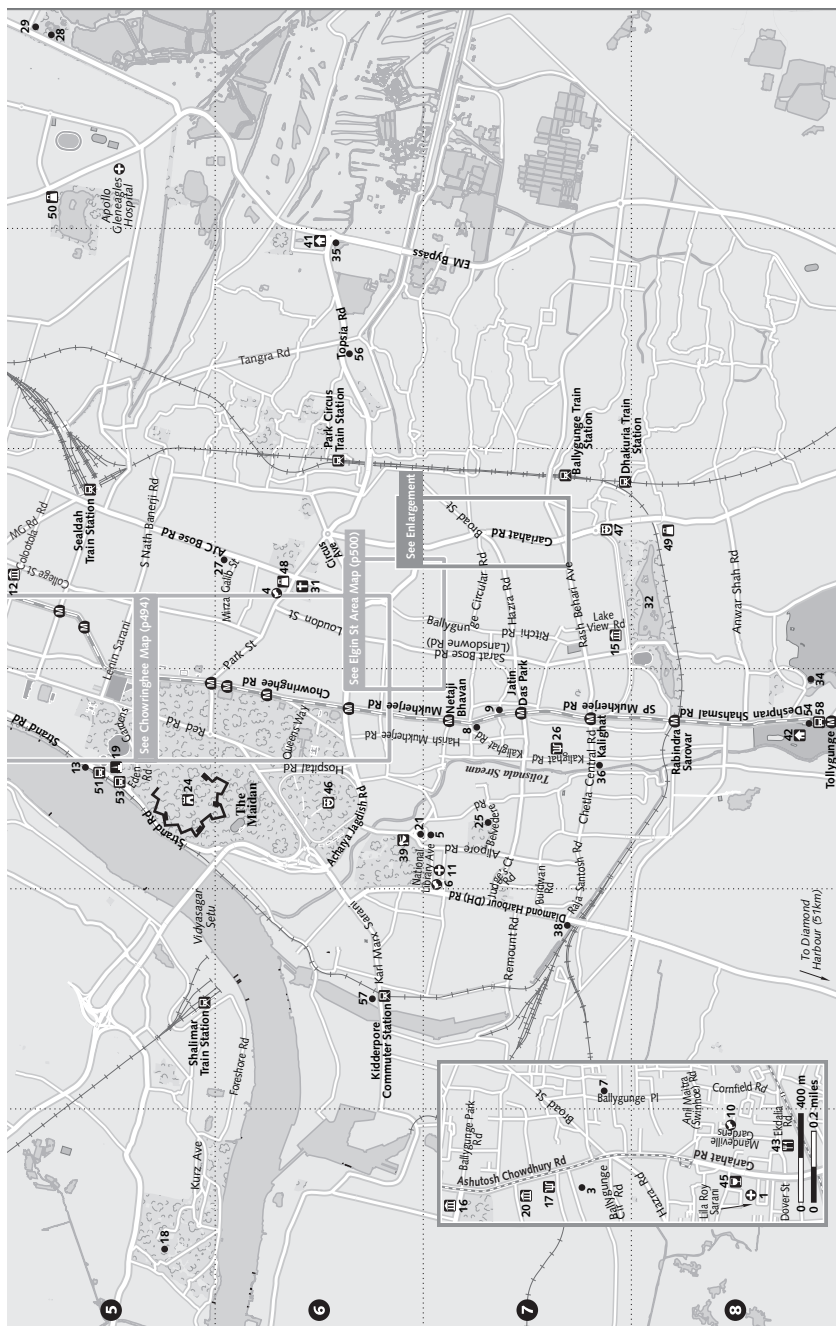
Lakshmi Puja (Oct) and **Kali Puja** (Diwali, Nov) feature more idol dunking.

Kolkata Film Festival (www.calfilmfestival.org; 2nd week of Nov) Week-long festival of Bengali and international movies, with lectures, discussions and special screenings, notably at the Nandan Complex (p511).

KOLKATA (CALCUTTA)

1	INFORMATION	Shanagar Burning Ghat.....	36	C7
		Apollo Glen Eagles Clinic.....	1	A8
		Sheetalnathi & Daudaji Jain Mandirs.....	37	E4
		Amranchal Pradesh State Office.....	2	F4
		Sparx.....	38	B7
		Mizoram State Office.....	4	D6
		Tollygunge Club Golf Course.....	(see 42)	
		National Library.....	5	C7
		Zoo.....	39	C6
		Nepali Consulate.....	6	C7
		RCPL Travels.....	7	B7
		Seagull Arts & Media Resource Centre.....	8	C7
		ITC Sonar Bangla Sheraton Hotel.....	41	E6
		Thailand Consulate.....	10	A8
		Woodlands Hospital.....	11	C7
2	SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Asutosh Museum of Indian Art.....	12	D5
		Babu Chhat.....	13	C5
		Dolly's Tea Shop.....	(see 49)	
		Birla Academy of Art & Culture.....	14	D2
		Indian Coffee House.....	44	D4
		Birla Industrial & Technological Museum.....	16	A7
		Birla Mandir.....	17	A7
		Botanical Gardens.....	18	A5
		Maidan Racecourse.....	46	C6
		Burmese Pagoda.....	19	C5
		Ramsakrishna Mission Institute of Culture.....	47	D7
		Centre of International Modern Art (CIWA).....	20	A7
		Curzon Mansion.....	21	C6
		Dakshineswar Kali Temple.....	22	D1
		Ankur Kalia.....	48	D6
		Digambar Jain Mandir.....	23	E3
		Dakshinapan Shopping Centre.....	49	D8
		Fort William.....	24	C5
		Swaburni.....	50	F5
		Horicultural Gardens.....	25	C7
		Kali Temple (Kalighat).....	26	C7
		Mother Teresa's Mission & Motherhouse.....	27	D6
		Nicko Park.....	28	F5
		Belur Math Chhat.....	51	C5
		Nicco Superbowl.....	29	F5
		Bus Stand.....	53	C5
		Nirmaal Holiday.....	(see 26)	
		Computerised Booking Office.....	54	C8
		Panchaiti Mosque.....	30	D4
		Dakshineswar Chhat.....	55	D1
		Emirates.....	56	E6
		Park St Cemetery.....	31	D6
		Rabindra Sarovar.....	32	D8
		Railway Museum.....	33	C4
		Andaman Ferry.....	34	C8
		Royal Calcutta Golf Club.....	34	C8
		Whiteliers Airport Bus Pickup Point.....	35	E6
		Science City.....	58	C8
3	SHOPPING	Babughat Bus Stand.....	51	C5
		Belur Math Chhat.....	52	D2
		Bus Stand.....	53	C5
		Computerised Booking Office.....	54	C8
		Dakshineswar Chhat.....	55	D1
		Emirates.....	56	E6
		Kidderpore Docks (Andaman Ferry).....	33	C4
		Whiteliers Airport Bus Pickup Point.....	35	E6
4	TRANSPORT	Babu Chhat.....	(see 13)	
		Babughat Bus Stand.....	51	C5
		Belur Math Chhat.....	52	D2
		Bus Stand.....	53	C5
		Computerised Booking Office.....	54	C8
		Dakshineswar Chhat.....	55	D1
		Emirates.....	56	E6
		Kidderpore Docks (Andaman Ferry).....	33	C4
		Whiteliers Airport Bus Pickup Point.....	35	E6





Left Luggage

Most Sudder St hotels will store bags for a fee. At the airport, diagonally across the carpark from the international terminal, is a useful cloakroom open 24 hours that charges Rs 5 per day per item. At Howrah and Sealdah train stations the 24-hour cloakrooms charge Rs 10 to 15 per bag per day and require users to show valid long-distance train tickets.

Libraries

Asiatic Society (Map p494; ☎ 22290779; www.asiaticsocietycal.com; 1 Park St; admission free; 🕒 10am–5pm Mon–Fri) Priceless collection of ancient books and illuminated manuscripts. A few of these are displayed in a mothballed one-room museum, including a letter signed by Shah Jahan and a 250 BC Ashokan inscription. Getting to see them involves a hilariously bureaucratic procedure involving five separate sign-ins on four different floors. Bring your passport.

National Library (Map pp488–9; ☎ 24791381; www.nllindia.org; 5 Alipore Rd; 🕒 9am–8pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–6pm Sat & Sun) The largest collection in India. Books are too numerous for open shelving, so are accessed from vaults by request slip. Membership is free but requires two photos.

Seagull Arts & Media Centre (Map pp488–9; ☎ 24556942; www.seagullindia.com; 36C SP Mukherjee Rd; day membership Rs 50) Arts bias, cultural events.

Medical Services

Apollo Gleneagles Clinic (Map pp488–9; ☎ 24618028; www.apollohospitals.com/Kolkata; 48/1F Lila Roy Sarani, Gariahat Rd; 🕒 8am–8pm) Health checks and dental work; its sister hospital in Salt Lake City offers 24-hour ambulance service.

Bellevue Clinic (Map p494; ☎ 22872321; www.bellevueclinic.com; 9 Loudon St) Hospital with 24-hour pharmacy.

STREET NAMES

After Independence, the Indian government changed any street name that had Raj-era connotations. The Communists continued the process. Humorously they chose to rename Harrington St so that the US consulate found itself on Ho Chi Minh Sarani.

Today most major Kolkata streets have two or even three names. Citizens and taxis still tend to go by the British-era names. But confusingly most maps, street signs and business cards use the new names (or sometimes both). This text uses what we found, quite unscientifically, to be the most commonly employed variant, *italicised* in the list below:

Old name	New name
<i>Ballygunge Rd</i>	Ashutosh Chowdhury Ave (<i>AC Rd</i>)
<i>Brabourne Rd</i>	Biplabi Trailokya Maharaja Rd
<i>Camac St</i>	Abinindranath Tagore St
Central Ave	<i>Chittaranjan (CR) Ave</i>
Chitpore Rd	<i>Rabindra Sarani</i>
<i>Chowringhee Rd</i>	Jawaharlal Nehru Rd
Free School St	<i>Mirza Ghalib St</i>
Harrington St	<i>Ho Chi Minh Sarani</i>
Harrison Rd	Mahatma Gandhi (<i>MG</i>) Rd
<i>Kyd St</i>	Dr M Ishaque Rd
Lansdowne Rd	<i>Sarat Bose Rd</i>
<i>Loudon St</i>	Dr UM Bramhchari St
Lower Circular Rd	<i>AJC Bose Rd</i>
<i>Old Court House St</i>	Hemant Basu Sarani
<i>Park St</i>	Mother Theresa Sarani
<i>Rowden St</i>	Sarojini Naidu Sarani
Theatre Rd	<i>Shakespeare Sarani</i>
Victoria Terrace	<i>Gorky Terrace</i>
<i>Waterloo St</i>	Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula Sarani
Wellesley St	<i>RAK (Rafi Ahmed Kidwai) Rd</i>
<i>Wood St</i>	Dr Martin Luther King Sarani

KOLKATA IN...

Two Days

From the north of the **Maidan** (p497), stroll at random through the crumbling colonial wonderland of **BBD Bagh** (p498). Collect a Marble Palace permit at West Bengal tourism (for tomorrow) then brace yourself for **Chinatown** (p498). Recover with a meal or coffee on **Park St** (p508) and tour the **Indian Museum** (p495). Reach the grandiose **Victoria Memorial** (p492) by 7.15pm for the sound-and-light show. Next day see the colourful **Mullik Ghat flower market** (p498) and head for **Belur Math** (p501) and **Dakshineswar** (p502), spiritual centres of the Ramakrishna movement. On the way back into town, stop off at the bizarre **Marble Palace** (p500). In the evening, fit in a cultural show at the **Nandan Complex** (p511).

Two Weeks

Kolkata's astounding contrasts aren't necessarily best appreciated by ticking off sights in standard touristic fashion. Consider approaching the city thematically.

Traditional Kolkata hand-drawn rickshaws (p514), effigy makers in Kumartuli (p501), sunset at Babu Ghat (p499), Mullik Ghat flower market (p499), sheep sacrifices at Kali Temple (p499)

Colonial Kolkata Victoria Memorial (p492), the main post office (p492), golf at the Tollygunge Club (p502), a flutter at the Maidan racecourse (p511), a drink at the Fairlawn Hotel (p510)

Modern Kolkata dancing at Tantra nightclub (p510), coffee at Barista (p510), simulator rides at Science City (p502), cocktails at Roxy (p510), browsing at Oxford Book Shop (p487)

Squalid Kolkata street kids on Howrah train station (p499), rubbish-pile homes in Chinatown (p498), volunteering (p502) to help the destitute

Multicultural Kolkata synagogues, mosques and churches of BBD Bagh (p497), Belur Math (p501), meditation evenings (p502), reading Tagore (p75), laughing-yoga at Rabindra Sarovar (p500)

SRL Ranbaxy Path Lab (Map p494; ☎ 22271315; 308 Chowringhee Rd; 🕒 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) Does same-day tests for dengue (Rs 1400) and Chikungunia (Rs 500).

Wockhardt Medical Centre (Map p494; ☎ 24754320/24754096; www.wockhardthospitals.net; 2/7 Sarat Bose Rd; consultation Rs 300; 🕒 doctor available 9am-1pm) Good first stop for a doctor's consultation.

Woolands Hospital (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24567075-89; 8/5 Alipore Rd)

For more extensive listings check www.kolkatainformation.com/diagnostic.html

Money

Most banks have ATMs accepting major international cards. There's a Camara Bank ATM on Kyd St, close to Sunder St. For foreign exchange, private moneychangers are much better than banks. Many will exchange travellers cheques but nobody seems to want Bangladeshi Takas. There are dozens more booths around Sunder St. Shop around for rates.

Globe Forex (Map p494; ☎ 22828780; 11 Ho Chi Minh Sarani; 🕒 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2.30pm Sat)

LKP Forex (Map p494; Hilton Hotel, Sunder St; 🕒 9am-9pm) Great rates and long hours in the foyer of a backpacker guest house.

Permits

FOREIGNERS' REGIONAL REGISTRATION OFFICE

You can get permits for Sikkim (free) in one working day at the **Foreigners' Regional Registration Office** (FRRO; Map p494; ☎ 22473301; 237A AJC Bose Rd; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri). For Manipur (Imphal only), Arunachal Pradesh (not Tawang) and Nagaland (Mon, Phek), FRRO has started offering limited-area permits for groups of four applicants, issued in 24 hours and for free. This sounds almost too good to be true. If it really works, please let us know! Each permit application requires one photo and a passport photocopy.

STATE OFFICES

The following can issue state-specific Inner Line permits to Indian nationals. However, except at Sikkim House, foreigners shouldn't expect any permit help whatsoever.

Arunachal Pradesh (Map pp488-9; ☎ 23341243;

Arunachal Bhawan, Block CE 109, Sector 1, Salt Lake City)

Manipur (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24758163; Manipur Bhawan, 26 Rowland Rd)

Mizoram (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24757887; Mizoram Bhawan, 24 Old Ballygunge Rd) Take the lane beside 23 AC Rd for 100m. Enter to left through unmarked black gates.

Nagaland (Map p494; ☎ 22825247; Nagaland House, 1st fl, 11 Shakespeare Sarani)

Sikkim (Map p494; ☎ 22815328; Sikkim House, 4/1 Middleton St) Permits issued within 24 hours if the issuing officer is in town. Bring your passport, a passport photo, and photocopies of your passport's identity pages and Indian visa.

Photography

Electro Photo-Lab (Map p494; ☎ 22498743; 14 Sudder St; ☎ 10am-10pm) Offers instant passport photos (Rs 60 for six mugshots), film developing and digi-prints.

Harico Electronics (Map p496; ☎ 22281345; 3B Chowringhee Rd) Stocks print- and slide-film, including Sensia 100 (Rs 220).

Post

Kolkata's imposing **main post office** (GPO; Map p496; Netaji Subhash Rd, BBD Bagh; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) is an attraction in itself, a statue of a traditional Bengali mail-runner standing beneath its vast central cupola. There's poste-restante service (passport required), a philatelic bureau and even a loveable little **postal museum** (☎ 22437331; Koilaghat St; ☎ 11am-4pm Mon-Sat).

Convenient branch post offices include Park St (Map p494) and Mirza Ghalib St (Map p494).

Courier services:

DHL (Map p494; ☎ 22813132; 21 Camac St; ☎ 24hr)

FedEx (☎ 22834325; Crescent Tower, AJC Bose Rd)

Telephone

The **Central Telegraph Office** (Map p496; Red Cross Pl; ☎ 24hr) has phone and fax services, but calls are just as cheap from ubiquitous PCO/STD/ISD booths throughout the city. Electro Photo-Lab (see above) sells SIM cards for mobile phones.

Tourist Information

Cultural happenings are announced in the *Telegraph* newspaper's *Metro* section or buy a copy of the very useful *Cal Calling* (Rs 30) from the entrance desk of West Bengal Tourism. **CityInfo** (www.explocity.com) is an advertisement-led listings pamphlet available free from better hotels.

India Tourism (Map p494; ☎ 22825813/22827731; 4 Shakespeare Sarani; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Gives away reasonably good Kolkata maps.

West Bengal Tourism (Map p496; ☎ 22488271; www.westbengaltourism.com; 3/2 BBD Bagh; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Somewhat chaotic, primarily selling tours.

Travel Agencies

There are dozens of travel agencies around Sudder St alone. Elsewhere useful addresses **RCPL Travels** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24400665; travelcal@vsnl.net; www.kingdomofbhutan.info; 5/4 Ballygunge Pl) Bhutan specialists.

include the following:

Travel People (Map p494; ☎ 22892291; www.travelpl.com; 227/2 AJC Bose Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) Professional and obliging.

Visa Extension

In an absolutely dire emergency, the FRRO (see Permits, p491) just might extend your Indian tourist visa by a few days. Don't count on it.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Kolkata feels remarkably unthreatening. There's a fair share of beggar-hassle around the tourist ghetto of Sudder St and some tourists have got into trouble there by accepting late-night invitations to sample drugs or girls – a dangerous idea in any city.

A more day-to-day worry is crossing the road: the mad traffic takes no prisoners. Pickpockets sometimes cruise public transport. *Bandhs* (strikes) occur with monotonous regularity, closing shops and stopping all land transport (excluding planes but including taxis to the airport). Monsoon-season flooding is highly inconvenient but rickshaw-wallahs somehow manage to ferry passengers through knee-deep, waterlogged streets.

SIGHTS

Most attractions that don't charge for photography forbid it.

Chowringhee Area

All of the sites in this area appear on Map p494, except where otherwise noted.

VICTORIA MEMORIAL

Had it been built for a beautiful Indian princess rather than a dead colonial queen, the incredible **Victoria Memorial** (VM; ☎ 22235142; admission to grounds Rs 4, to interior Indian/foreigner Rs 20/150; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) would surely rate as one of India's greatest buildings. It's a vast, beautifully proportioned confection of white marble domes set in attractive, well-tended parkland. Think US Capitol meets Taj Mahal.

Built to commemorate Queen Victoria's 1901 diamond jubilee, the structure was finally finished nearly 20 years after her death. It's

most photogenic viewed at sunset across reflecting ponds from the northeast. But the many interior galleries are worth seeing, especially the Kolkata Gallery, which traces an impressively even-handed history of the city, including the experience of Indians living under British rule. Some colonial statues offer a chuckle. Before the north door a sleepy Victoria seems to be nodding off on her throne. In the main entranceway King George V faces his wife Mary but looks more the queen himself in his camp posing britches. No wonder interior photography is forbidden.

By day, enter from north or south gates (though you can exit to the east). For the informative English-language **sound-and-light show** (Indian/foreigner Rs 10/20; ☎ 7.15pm Tue-Sun) enter from the east gate.

AROUND THE VM

In the evenings around the VM's north gate, local couples surreptitiously fondle (and more) in the surrounding gardens, take **horse carriage rides** along Queens Way or watch the sweetly gaudy play of **musical fountains**.

Loosely styled on the Buddhist stupa at Sarnath, the nearby **Birla Planetarium** (☎ 22231516; Chowringhee Rd) is one of the world's largest and looks impressive when floodlit. Its outer circle forms a small but well-presented, tomb-like gallery featuring astronomer busts and planetary pictures. But the **star shows** (admission Rs 20;

☎ 1.30pm & 6.30pm in English) are slow moving and rather stilted.

Whitewashed with a central crenellated tower, the 1847 **St Paul's Cathedral** (☎ 22230127; Cathedral Rd; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm) would look quite at home in Cambridgeshire. Inside, its extraordinarily broad, unbuttressed nave twitters with birdsong and retains the original hardwood pews. Don't miss the stained-glass west window by pre-Raphaelite maestro Sir Edward Burne-Jones.

The bright, ground-floor galley of the **Academy of Fine Arts** (☎ 22234302; 2 Cathedral Rd) has changing **exhibitions** (admission free; ☎ 3-8pm) featuring local contemporary artists. The dusty upstairs **museum** (admission Rs 5; ☎ noon-6.30pm Tue-Sun) has a room each of Mughal miniatures, old textiles, antique carpets and 20th-century paintings. There's also a special, air-conditioned shrine-like room displaying several watercolours by Bengali-Renaissance superstar Rabindranath Tagore (see also p501).

THE MAIDAN

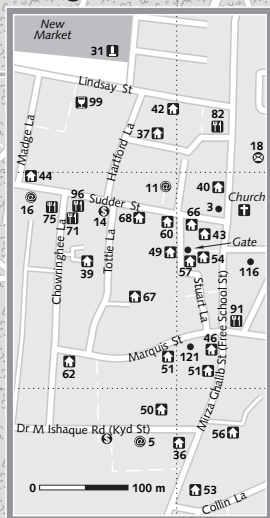
After the 'Black Hole' fiasco, a moated 'second' **Fort William** (Map pp488-9; closed to public) was constructed in octagonal, Vaubanesque form (1758). The whole village of Gobindapur was flattened to give the new fort's cannons a clear line of fire. Though sad for then-residents, this created the **Maidan** (pronounced moi-dan), a vast 3km-long park that is today as

MOTHER TERESA

For many people, Mother Teresa (1910-97), was the living image of human sacrifice. Born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu to Albanian parents in Uskup (now Skopje, Macedonia), she joined the Irish Order of Loreto nuns and worked for over a decade teaching in Calcutta's **St Mary's High School** (☎ 2298451; 92 Ripon St). Horrified by the city's spiralling poverty she established a new order, the Missionaries of Charity and, in 1952, opened Nirmal Hridy (Sacred Heart; see p499). This was the first of many refuges offering free shelter and a little human dignity to the destitute and dying. Although the order expanded into an international charity, Mother Teresa herself continued to live in absolute simplicity. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 and beatified by the Vatican in October 2003, the first official step towards being made a saint.

But this 'Saint of the Gutters' is not universally beloved. For some Kolkatans it's slightly galling to find their cultured, predominantly Hindu city popularly linked in the world's mind with a Catholic heroine whose work underlined the city's least appealing facet. Meanwhile Germaine Greer has accused Mother Teresa of religious imperialism, while Christopher Hitchens' book, *The Missionary Position*, decries the donations from dictators and corrupt tycoons. Many have questioned the Missionaries of Charity's minimal medical background and Teresa's staunchly Catholic position against contraception, which seems particularly untenable given Kolkata's growing AIDS and hepatitis epidemic. Of course, the organisation was never primarily focused on saving lives, simply offering a little love to the dying. Before Mother Teresa, even that was an unknown luxury for the truly destitute. But today, for the critics, it's not quite enough.

CHOWRINGHEE



KOLKATA (CALCUTTA)

See BBD Bagh Map (p496)



See Enlargement

See Elgin St Area Map (p500)

INFORMATION		
Asiatic Society.....	1	B2
Bellevue Clinic.....	2	D5
Bookland Bookstall.....	3	B2
Classic Books/Earthcare Books.....	4	B4
Cyberia.....	5	A3
DHL.....	6	C4
Electro Photo-Lab.....	7	C2
FedEx.....	(see 123)	
FRRO.....	8	B6
Geographical Survey of India.....	9	C4
Globe Forex.....	10	C4
Hotline/Saree Palace.....	11	A2
I-Way.....	12	C3
India Tourism.....	13	B5
LKP Forex.....	14	A2
Nagaland State Office.....	15	C5
Netfreaks.....	16	A2
Oxford Book Shop.....	17	C3
Post Office.....	18	B1
Post Office.....	19	C3
Sikkim State Office.....	20	C4
SRL Ranbaxy Path Lab.....	21	B2
Travel People.....	22	D6
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
Academy of Fine Arts.....	23	A5
Aurobindo Bhawan.....	24	B5
Birla Planetarium.....	25	B5
Calcutta Rescue.....	26	D2
Horse Carriage Rides.....	27	A4
Indian Museum.....	28	C2
Megabowl.....	(see 111)	
Musical Fountains.....	29	A4
Nehru Children's Museum.....	30	B5
New Market Clocktower.....	31	A1
St Paul's Cathedral.....	32	B5
Victoria Memorial.....	33	A5
VM Sound-and-Light Show.....	34	A5
VM Viewpoint.....	35	A4
SLEEPING 		
Aafren Tower.....	36	B3
Ashreen Guest House.....	37	A1
Astor.....	38	C4
Capital Guest House.....	39	A2
Centrepoint Guest House.....	40	B2
Chowringhee YMCA.....	41	C1
CKT Inn.....	42	A1
Continental Guesthouse.....	43	B2
Fairlawn Hotel.....	44	A2
Golden Park.....	45	B4
Hotel Gulshan Palace.....	46	B2
Hotel Hindusthan International.....	47	B6
Hotel Majestic International.....	48	D1
Hotel Maria.....	49	A2
Hotel Neelam.....	50	A3
Hotel Presidency Inn.....	51	A2
Hotel VIP InterContinental.....	52	B2
Housez 43.....	53	B3
Jaapon Guest House.....	54	B2
Lytton Hotel.....	55	C2
Milan Guest House.....	56	B3
Modern Lodge.....	57	B2
Obero Grand.....	58	C1
Old Kenilworth Hotel.....	59	B4
Paragon Hotel.....	60	A2
Park Hotel.....	61	C2
Pioneer International.....	62	A2
Salvation Army Red Shield Guest House.....	63	C2
Senator Hotel.....	64	C5
Sikkim House Hotel.....	(see 20)	
Sunflower Guest House.....	65	C3
Super Guest House.....	66	B2
Times Guest House.....	(see 96)	
Timestar Hotel.....	67	A2
Tourist Inn.....	68	A2
EATING 		
Aminia.....	69	C1
Baan Thai.....	(see 58)	
Bar-B-Q.....	70	C3
Blue Sky Cafe.....	71	A2
Drive Inn.....	72	B4
Dynasty Restaurant.....	(see 55)	
Fire and Ice.....	73	B4
Food First.....	74	C5
Fresh & Juicy.....	75	A2
Golden Dragon.....	76	C3
Haldirans.....	77	B5
Hong Kong.....	(see 52)	
Hot Kati Rolls.....	78	C2
Ivory.....	79	C4
Jalapenos.....	80	C4
Jarokha/Gupta Brothers.....	81	C3
Kathleen Confectioners.....	82	B1
Kathleen Confectioners.....	83	B5
Kookie Jar.....	84	D5
Mocambo.....	85	C3
Nizams.....	86	C1
On Track.....	87	C3
Only Parathas.....	88	B5
Peter Cat.....	89	C3
Pizza Hut.....	90	C4
Radhuni.....	91	B2
Ridhi Sidhi.....	(see 109)	
Rupasi Bangla.....	92	C3
Snacks Stalls.....	93	C1
Teej.....	94	C3
Tung Fong.....	95	C3
Türkisch Çörner.....	(see 53)	
Zurich Restaurant.....	96	A2
DRINKING  		
Aqua Bar.....	(see 61)	
Ashalayam.....	(see 52)	
Barista.....	(see 105)	
Barista.....	97	C4
Barista.....	98	C3
Blue & Beyond Restaurant.....	99	A1
Cafe Coffee Day.....	(see 89)	
Cafe Coffee Day.....	(see 84)	
Chowringhee Bar.....	(see 58)	
Copper Chimney Lounge.....	100	D5
Fairlawn Hotel.....	(see 44)	
Flury's.....	101	C3
Roxy.....	(see 61)	
Someplace Else.....	(see 61)	
ENTERTAINMENT 		
Globe.....	102	C1
Little High.....	(see 107)	
Marrakech.....	103	C3
Nandan Cinema.....	104	A5
New Empire Cinema.....	105	C1
Sisir Mancha.....	106	B5
Tantra.....	(see 61)	
Veom.....	107	C5
SHOPPING 		
Ashalayam.....	(see 52)	
Assam Craft Emporium.....	108	C4
Emami Shoppers' City.....	109	B5
Hawkers' Market.....	110	C1
Metro Shopping Centre.....	111	B4
Music World.....	(see 101)	
Nagaland Emporium.....	(see 15)	
Planet M.....	112	C4
Women's Friendly Society.....	113	D4
TRANSPORT		
Air India.....	114	B5
Air Sahara.....	115	B5
Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC).....	116	B2
Biman Bangladesh Airlines.....	117	C3
GMG Airlines.....	118	C3
Gulf Air.....	119	C6
Jet Airways.....	120	C3
Shyamoli Paribahan.....	121	B2
Singapore Airlines.....	122	B6
Thai Airways International.....	123	C6

fundamental to Kolkata as Central Park is to New York City. Fort William remains hidden within a walled military zone, but for an amusingly far-fetched tale of someone who managed to get in, read *Simon Winchester's Calcutta*.

INDIAN MUSEUM

Around central lawns, Kolkata's main **museum** ( 22499979; www.indianmuseum-Calcutta.org; Chowringhee Rd; Indian/foreigner/camera Rs 10/150/50;  10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) fills a glorious colonnaded palace with

aging glass-and-hardwood display cabinets that are almost attractions in themselves. Exhibits range from fabulous Hindu bronzes to whole elephant skeletons. Notice the 2000-year-old eyeliner pencils, gag at the human embryos in formaldehyde and don't miss the impressive life-size reproduction of the 2nd-century BC Barhut Gateway. Before 1875, many exhibits were originally displayed by the Asiatic Society (see p490) in one of Asia's earliest museums.

BBD BAGH



KOLKATA (CALCUTTA)

See Chowringhee Map (p494)

The Maidan

Eden Gardens

State Bank of India Headquarters

To Babughat Jetty

PARK STREET CEMETERY

Today Park St is one of Kolkata's top commercial avenues. But when it was constructed in the 1760s, it was a simple causeway across uninhabited marshlands built for mourners to access the then-new **Park Street Cemetery** (Map pp488-9; nr Park St & AJC Bose Rd; ☎ 7.30am-4.30pm). Today that cemetery remains a wonderful oasis of calm with mossy Raj-era graves – from rotundas to soaring pyramids – jostling for space in a lightly manicured jungle. Buying the guide booklet (Rs 100) supports its maintenance.

MOTHER TERESA'S MISSION

Mother Teresa's large, sober tomb is situated within the Sisters of Charity's **Motherhouse** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 2452277; 54a AJC Bose Rd; ☎ visits 8am-noon & 3-6pm Fri-Wed, prayers 4.30pm Fri, volunteer briefings 3pm Mon, Wed & Fri). There's a small **museum** displaying Teresa's worn sandals and battered enamel dinner-bowl. Upstairs, **'Mother's room'** is preserved in all its simplicity with a crown-of-thorns above her modest camp bed. Serious pilgrims or volunteers only are welcome as visitors disturb the running of the house.

Enter opposite The Web internet café in the first alley north of Ripon St.

BBD Bagh Area

All of the sites in this area appear on Map p496, except where otherwise noted.

NORTH OF THE MAIDAN

Curiosities around New Market (see p511) include the fascinatingly crumbling **Futani Chambers**, the perfect '50s-style façade of **Elite Cinema**, the brilliant colonial-era **Metropolitan Building** and the fanciful **Tippu Sultan's Mosque**. On an elegant palm-shaded courtyard tucked unexpectedly behind a barrier of hawkers' stalls, the luxurious **Oberoi Grand** (see p505) hotel offers blissfully elegant respite from the surrounding commotion.

Across Esplanade bus station, the north end of the Maidan is dotted with monuments. Circus performers, political firebrands and dealers in mystic medicines frequently entertain crowds around the **Sahid Minar**, a 48m-tall round-topped obelisk originally celebrating a British military leader. Beyond is a sombre **WWI cenotaph** and a **statue of LBG Tilak**, who disdains the perfectly framed (if gated) view of the grand 1799 **Raj Bahvan** (<http://rajbhavankolkata.nic.in/main.asp>; closed to public). Though designed to resemble Lord Curzon's English country house, the Raj Bahvan actually looks more like the US White House. It's now the highly guarded official residence of the West Bengal governor.

The vast **Ranji Stadium** in **Eden Gardens** hosts international cricket matches. Behind is a lake and picturesque **Burmese pagoda**, but they're currently out-of-bounds due to an arcane

INFORMATION		Raj Bhavan.....	23 B5	Chennai Kitchen.....	45 C5
Central Telegraph Office.....	1 B4	Ram Prasad Apothecary.....	24 D1	KC Das.....	46 C5
DiracWay.....	2 D5	Ranji Stadium.....	25 A6	Song Hay.....	47 B5
Harico Electronics.....	3 C6	Sahid Minar.....	26 B6		
Main Post Office.....	4 B4	St Andrew's Church.....	27 C4	DRINKING ☑	
Maldives Honourary Consulate... 5 A5		St John's Church.....	28 A4	Broadway Bar.....	(see 39)
West Bengal Tourism.....	6 B4	Standard Buildings.....	29 B4	Rocks.....	48 C5
		Statue of LBG Tilak.....	30 A6		
		Stone Carving Workshops.....	31 D1	SHOPPING ☑	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Togore's House.....	32 D1	Central Cottage Industries	
Armenian Church.....	7 C2	Tippu Sultan's Mosque.....	33 C5	Emporium.....	(see 19)
BethEl Synagogue.....	8 C3	Treasury Building.....	34 A5	Mondal & Sons.....	49 C4
Black Hole Memorial.....	9 A4	West Bengal Assembly Building.. 35 A5			
Calcutta Society for the		West Bengal Tourism.....	(see 6)	TRANSPORT	
Prevention of Cruelty to		Writers' Building.....	36 B4	Armenian Ghat.....	50 B2
Animals Veterinary Hospital.. 10 D4		WWI Cenotaph.....	37 B6	Bishe June Ghat.....	51 A4
Chinese Temples.....	11 D3			Computerised Booking Office... 52 A4	
Elephant Gateway.....	12 D3	SLEEPING ☑		Computerised Booking Office... 53 B3	
Elite Cinema.....	13 C6	Bengal Buddhist Association.... 38 D4		Cosmic Air.....	54 D4
Former Nanking Restaurant &		Broadway Hotel.....	39 D5	Esplanade Bus Stand.....	55 B6
Garbage Heap Homes.....	14 D4	Esplanade Chambers.....	(see 41)	Fairlie Ghat.....	56 A3
High Court.....	15 A5	Great Eastern Hotel.....	40 B5	Fairlie Ghat (Private Ferry)..... 57 A3	
Holy Rosary Cathedral.....	16 C2	Gypsy Inn.....	41 D5	Foreign Tourist Bureau.....	58 B3
Kolkata Panorama.....	17 A5	Hotel Embassy.....	42 C5	Indian Airlines.....	59 D5
Mausoleum of Job Charnock... 18 A4		Yatri Niwas.....	43 A2	Minibus to Airport Gate 1 via	
Metropolitan Building.....	19 C6			Dum Dum.....	60 B4
Moghlan David Synagogue..... 20 C3		EATING ☑		Shipping Corporation of India	
Nakhoda Mosque.....	21 D3	Amber/Essence.....	44 C5	(Ferry Tickets).....	61 A4
Postal Museum.....	22 B4				

political squabble. Instead, walk past the western end of the low-domed **West Bengal Assembly building** for the most impressive view of the resplendent **High Court** building, a wonderful architectural mongrel halfway between Oxford college and Venetian opera set. In slightly more restrained style is the grand **treasury building**, whose arched cloisters are comically stacked with decades worth of dusty paperwork bundles that bureaucrats never need yet don't dare to throw away. Between the two is the imposing colonnaded cube of the **former Calcutta Town Hall Building** (4 Esplanade West). Here **Kolkata Panorama** (☎ 22131098; guided tour Indian/foreigner Rs 10/100; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun) introduces the city's heritage through a lively collection of working models and interactive exhibits. It's well designed, though historically selective, and many foreigners will struggle to appreciate fully the detailed sections on Bengali popular culture.

Yet more colonnades buttress the stone-spined 1787 **St John's Church** (☎ 22436098; K Sankar Roy Rd; admission Rs 10; ☎ 8am-5pm). In its somewhat overgrown grounds are two curious octagonal monuments, the **mausoleum of Job Charnock**, Kolkata's disputed 'founder', and a 1902 **Black Hole Memorial** that was hidden away here in 1940.

AROUND BBD BAGH

Aranged around BBD Bagh is much of Kolkata's finest colonial architecture. Originally called Tank Sq, its palm-lined central reservoir-lake ('tank') once supplied the young city's water. Some locals still use its later-colonial name **Dalhousie Sq**, commemorating British Lieutenant-Governor Lord Dalhousie. But with delicious irony, the square is now re-named after the nationalists who tried to assassinate him. In fact the BBD trio (Binoy, Badal and Dinesh) bungled their 1930 raid, killing instead an unlucky prisons inspector. Nonetheless the attack was a highly symbolic moment in the self-determination struggle. The assassination took place within the photogenic 1780 **Writers' Building**, whose glorious south façade looks something like a French provincial city hall. Originally built for clerks ('writers') of the East India Company, it's still a haven of pen-pushing bureaucracy.

There are many more imposing colonial edifices. The red-brick **Standard Buildings** (32 BBD Bagh) have carved nymphs and wonderful wrought-iron balconies at the rear. The

former **Standard Chartered Building** (Netaji Subhash Rd) has a vaguely Moorish feel, while **St Andrew's Church** has a fine Wren-style spire. The grandly domed, 1866 **General Post Office** (see p492) was built on the ruins of the original Fort William, site of the infamous 'Black Hole of Calcutta' (see p486).

BARABAZAAR & CHINATOWN

Scattered north and northeast of BBD Bagh lies an unexpected wealth of religious buildings. Alone none warrants a special trip, but weaving between them is a great excuse to explore some of Kolkata's most vibrantly chaotic alleys. Looking like a tall-spined church, **Moghan David Synagogue** (Canning St) is somewhat more impressive than **Bethel Synagogue** (Pollock St). The 1797 Portuguese-Catholic **Holy Rosary Cathedral** (Brabourne Rd; ☎ 6am-11am) has eye-catching crown-topped side towers. Hidden away amid the bustle of Old China Bazaar St, the 1707 **Armenian Church** (Armenian St; ☎ 9am-11am Sun) is claimed to be Kolkata's oldest place of Christian worship. It has a low but finely proportioned, whitewashed spire that's best spied from Bonfield Lane. To the east the 1926 red-sandstone **Nakhoda Mosque** (1 Zakaria St) rises impressively above the bustling shop fronts of ever-fascinating Rabindra Sarani. Its roof, bristling with domes and minarets, was modelled on Akbar's tomb at Sikandra. Less than 500m south lie the scanty remnants of Kolkata's ragged little **Chinatown**. Most Chinese have since moved away, and at first glance the area looks pretty unappealing. But if you wander up Damzen Lane you'll find two **Chinese Temples** (one now used as a local school) and a somewhat decrepit **gateway** (10 Damzen Lane) – built big enough for the family's domestic elephants. Just off the main road Chhatawali Gali (Lushun Sarani), notice the sad ruins of the once-grand 1924 **Nangking Restaurant**. To get a closer look you'll pass an extensive shoulder-high **garbage heap**. But it's more than garbage. At closer inspection you'll see that Kolkata streetfolk have burrowed homes right into it. Very humbling.

Hooghly Riverbank

The Hooghly might look unappealingly murky, but it's holy to Hindu Kolkatans whose main festivals often involve plunging divine *puja* images into its waters (see p487). The riverside **ghats** are interesting any morning or evening when die-hard devotees bathe

and make offerings. A photogenic if distinctly seedy vantage point is **Babu Ghat** (Map pp488-9), hidden behind a grubby, pseudo-Greek gateway near Eden Gardens. Here the votive floating candles simply add to the spectacle of colourful sunsets viewed through the impressively elegant **Vidyasagar Setu** suspension bridge. Crossing that bridge takes you (eventually) to the **Botanical Gardens** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 26685357; 🕒 7am-5pm) that were founded in 1786 to develop a then newly discovered herbal bush called 'tea'. The gardens' 200-year-old **banyan tree** is claimed to have the second-largest canopy in the world.

HOWRAH (HAORA)

Howrah bridge (Rabindra Setu; Map pp488-9), Kolkata's 700m-long architectural icon, is a vibrating abstraction of steel cantilevers, traffic fumes and sweat. Although over 60 years old, it probably remains the world's busiest bridge. Beneath the east end, **Mullik Ghat flower market** is a sensory overload of sights and smells that's very photogenic. But beware that photography of the bridge itself is strictly prohibited. Nonetheless you might be able to sneak a discreet shot from one of the various river-ferries that ply across the Hooghly to the vast **Howrah train station**. This 1906 edifice has clusters of towers topped in terracotta tiles giving it a look reminiscent of a Spanish desert citadel. The station serves millions daily, emptying trains picked clean by legions of destitute street children who are the subject of much charity work and plenty of moving prose.

Some 500m south, the new open-air **Railway Museum** (admission Rs 5; 🕒 1-8pm Fri-Wed) has a two-storey model of Howrah train station, several 19th-century steam locos and a toy-train ride (adult/child Rs 20/10).

South Kolkata

KALIGHAT

Between Kalighat and Jatin Das Park Metro stations, Kalighat's **Kali Temple** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 22231516; 🕒 5am-2pm & 4-10pm) is Kolkata's holiest spot. The current structure, painted silver-grey with rainbow highlights, dates from 1809. Of course the site is many, many centuries older (see p486) and possibly the source of Kolkata's name. Inside, pilgrims jostle to present hibiscus offerings to the three-eyed Kali image whose crown can occasionally be glimpsed through the throng from the bell-pavilion. Priests loitering around the temple

might whisk you to the front of the queue for an obligatory 'donation' (around Rs 50 per person). Behind the Mandir, goats are ritually beheaded to honour the ever-demanding goddess.

The temple is entered from the west along a narrow alley. Right next door is Mother Teresa's world famous, if surprisingly small, **Nirmal Hriday** (251 Kalighat Rd) home for the dying (see boxed text, p493), with neo-Mughal minidomes pimpling the roof corners.

Surrounding alleys are full of **market stalls** selling votive flowers, brassware, religious artefacts and Kali pictures. Off **Kalighat Rd** you may spot pot-painter artisans at work.

A short walk away on the putrid Tolisnala Stream, **Shanagar Burning Ghat** hosts an impressive gaggle of monuments to celebrities cremated there.

ALIPORE

Kolkata's 16-hectare **zoo** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24791152; Alipore Rd; admission Rs 10; 🕒 9am-5pm Fri-Wed) first opened in 1875. The spacious lawns and lakeside promenades are very popular with weekend picnickers and although some big-cat cages are rather confining, it rates as one of India's best zoos. Until he died in March 2006 the oldest resident had been Adwaita, an approximately 200-year-old giant tortoise, once the pet of controversial colonialist Robert Clive (see p48). Take bus 230 from Rabindra Sadan.

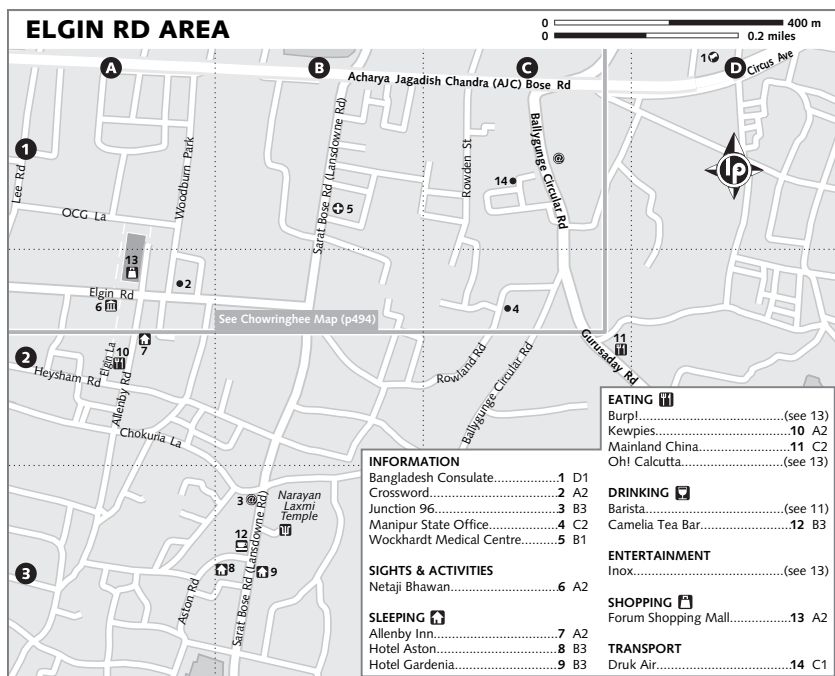
Directly south of the zoo's entrance, the access road to the National Library loops around the very regal **Curzon Mansion**, once the colonial Viceroy's residence. It's not (yet) a museum.

Around 1km southeast on Belvedere Rd are the delightfully tranquil **Horticultural Gardens** (Map pp488-9; admission Rs 10; 🕒 6-10am & 1-5pm).

ELGIN ROAD & GARIAHAT

Opposite the modern Forum Mall, **Netaji Bhawan** (Map p500; ☎ 24756139; www.netaji.org; 38/2 Elgin Rd; admission Rs 5; 🕒 11am-4pm Tue-Sun) is the former family home of Subhas Chandra Bose (p501), displaying personal effects of the iconic Independence fighter.

Further east **CIMA** (Centre for International Modern Art; Map pp488-9; ☎ 24858509; Sunny Towers, 2nd fl, 43 Ashutosh Chowdhury Rd; admission free; 🕒 11am-7pm Tue-Sat, 3-7pm Mon) is one of the best places in Kolkata to see cutting-edge contemporary Bengali art, though the exhibition space is not enormous.



The nearby **Birla Mandir** (Map pp488-9; Gariahat Rd; ☎ 6-11.30am & 4.30-9pm) is a large Lakshmi Narayan temple complex in cream-coloured sandstone whose three classically corn-cob shaped towers are more impressive for their size than their carvings. The temple was built between 1970 and 1996 by one of India's wealthiest clans.

RABINDRA SAROVAR

Scenic in the dawn haze, **Rabindra Sarovar** (Map pp488-9) is a lake ringed by parkland where Kolkatans gather for early-morning yoga, meditation and group exercises. These include ho-ho ha-ha-ha group laugh-ins. At such informal **Laughing Clubs** (☎ 6am-7am), engagingly described by Tony Hawks in *The Weekenders: Adventures in Calcutta*, a good (even if forced) giggle can be refreshingly therapeutic.

Facing the park further east, the **Birla Academy of Art & Culture** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24666802; 109 Southern Ave; admission Rs 2; ☎ 4-7pm Tue-Sun) has lively temporary exhibitions and an impressive three-storey Dakatkali statue in its grounds, visible through the gates: passers-by pay quiet homage.

Northeast of the lake, the **Gariahat** area is one of Kolkata's most popular local shopping areas.

North Kolkata

KOLKATA UNIVERSITY AREA

College St is the heartland of Kolkata's vibrant academic universe. The **Asutosh Museum of Indian Art** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 22410071; www.caluniv.ac.in; Centenary Bldg, 87/1 College St; admission Rs 10; ☎ 11.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) has priceless if slightly dry displays of fabulous antique Indian sculpture, brasswork and Bengali terracotta, with some more light-hearted toys and 20th-century folk art upstairs. The museum is down the first lane off College St as you walk north from Colootola Rd. It's within **Kolkata University**, facing some grand, older collegiate buildings. Nearby is the mythic Indian Coffee House (p509).

MARBLE PALACE

This extraordinarily grand 1853 **mansion** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 22393310; 46 Muktabar Babu St; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Wed & Fri-Sun) is indulgently overstuffed with statues and lavishly floored with marble inlay.

Yet its fine paintings droop in their dusty frames and the antique furniture is haphazardly draped in torn old dust sheets. It would make a great horror-movie set.

Although admission is technically free, guards, 'guides' and even the toilet monitor are expectant of tips. Importantly, before visiting you need to get a permission note from either West Bengal Tourism or India Tourism (see p492). However, some travellers report bribing their way in without.

To find the site from MG Rd metro station, walk two blocks north – away from the striking modernist **Panchaiti Mosque** (Chittaranjan Ave) – turning west between sari shops at 171 and 173 Chittaranjan Ave.

To continue to Tagore's House, walk west down Muktaram Babu St, turn right on Rabindra Sarani, and walk north for two blocks passing the wonderful olde-worlde **Ram Prasad apothecary shop** (204 Rabindra Sarani) and some interesting **stone-carving workshops**.

TAGORE'S HOUSE

Within Rabindra Bharati University, Rabindranath Tagore's comfortable 1784 family mansion has become a shrine-like **museum** (Rabindra Bharati Museum; Map pp488-9; ☎ 22695242; 246D Rabindra Sarani; Indian/foreigner Rs 10/50, student Rs 5/25; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) to India's greatest modern poet. Even if his personal effects don't inspire you, some of the well-chosen quotations might spark an interest in Tagore's deeply universalist philosophy. There's also a decent gallery of paintings by his family and contemporaries. The photo of Tagore with Einstein could win a 'World's Wildest Hair' competition.

JAIN TEMPLES

Several eye-catching Jain temples are grouped together on Badridas Temple St. The best known of the temples is 1867 **Sheetalnathji Jain Mandir** (Map pp488-9; donation appropriate; 🕒 6am-11.30am & 3-7pm), a dazzling pastiche of colourful mosaics, spires, columns and slivered figurines. Directly opposite, the more sedate 1810 **Dadaji Jain Mandir** has a central marble tomb-temple patterned with silver studs. The temples are 1.6km from Shyam Bazar metro, two blocks south of Aurobindo Sarani via Raja Dinendra Rd.

In bird-filled gardens 250km west of Belgachia Metro, the **Digambar Jain Mandir** (Map pp488-9; 🕒 6am-noon & 5-7pm), has a tall light-house style tower. On closer examination the tower's 'lamp' actually contains a meditating ministatue.

KUMARTULI

This fascinating district is named for the *kumar* (sculptors) who fashion giant **puja effigies** of the gods, eventually to be ritually immersed in the holy Hooghly. Different workshops in lanes off Rabindra Sarani specialise in certain body parts, creating the straw frames, adding clay coatings or painting the divine features with brilliant colours. Kumar workshops are busiest for the two months before the October/November Durga Puja festival (see p487).

BELUR MATH

Amid palms and manicured lawns, this extensive, peaceful **religious centre** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 26545892; www.sriramakrishna.org/belur.htm; Grand Trunk

SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE

In the early 1940s the two most prominent figures in the Indian anticolonial campaign were Gandhi (who favoured nonviolence) and Subhas Chandra Bose (who certainly didn't). Eminently intelligent, Cambridge-educated Bose managed to become Chief Executive of Calcutta despite periods in jail after accusations of assault and terrorism. During WWII he fled first to Germany, then Japan. He formed the Indian National Army (INA) mostly by recruiting Indian soldiers from Japanese POW camps. The INA then marched with Japan's invading force towards northeastern India, getting bogged down, and eventually defeated in Manipur and Nagaland. Bose fled but later died in a mysterious plane crash.

Today his image is somewhat ambivalent in much of India. But in Bengal, Bose remains a hero nicknamed *Netaji* (revered leader). Patriotic songs are intoned before his many statues and Kolkata's airport is named for him.

In 2005 Shyam Benegal's biographical film *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero* was taken to court by radical Bose supporters for suggesting that the Bengali hero secretly married a non-Indian.

Rd; ☎ 6.30am-noon & 3.30-8.30pm) is the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission. Its centrepiece is the huge 1938 **Ramakrishna Mandir** (☎ 6.30am-12.30 & 3.30-8pm), which somehow manages to look like a cathedral, Indian palace and Istanbul's Aya Sofya all at the same time. That's deliberate and perfectly in keeping with the message of 19th-century Indian sage **Ramakrishna Paramahansa** who preached the unity of all religions.

Within the compound on the Hooghly riverbank, several smaller **shrines** (☎ 6.30am-11.30 & 3.30-5.15pm) include the **Sri Sarada Devi Temple** entombing the guru's wife. Larger yet essentially similar in design, the 1924 **Swami Vivekananda Temple** marks the cremation spot of the mission's founder and Ramakrishna's most famous disciple. **Swami Vivekananda's room** is also preserved.

Accessed from the car park is an interesting **museum** (admission Rs 3; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 3.30-5.30pm Tue-Sun) that charts the life and times of Ramakrishna and associates.

Take minibus 10 from the Esplanade or bus 56 from Howrah train station. Continue your Ramakrishna experience with a boat across the Hooghly to Dakshineswar.

DAKSHINESWAR KALI TEMPLE

Shaped like an Indian Sacré Coeur, this 1847 **Kali Temple** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 25645222; ☎ 6.30am-noon & 3.30-9pm) was where Ramakrishna started his remarkable spiritual journey. Decorated with sepia photos, Ramakrishna's small room is now a place of special meditative reverence. Find it in the outer northwest corner of the temple precinct.

Taxis from Shyam Bazar metro cost Rs 85. However, arriving by (uncovered) river boat from Belur Math Ghat (Rs 7, 20 minutes) is an integral part of the Dakshineswar experience.

ACTIVITIES

Bowling

Several modern bowling alleys charge Rs 80 to 90 per game plus Rs 30 entry. Try **Megabowl** (Map p494; ☎ 22881311; 3rd fl, Metro Shopping Centre; ☎ 11am-9pm), **Sparkz** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24481744; Diamond Harbour Rd, Alipore) beneath Majerhat Bridge or **Nicco Superbowl** (Map pp488-9; ☎ noon-10pm) beside Nicco Park (opposite).

Golf

The beautiful golf course at the **Tollygunge Club** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24732316 ext 142; SP Mukherjee Rd) charges US\$40 green fees for visitors but

only Rs 150 if you're staying here. Renting clubs ranges Rs 100 to 300.

The magnificent **Royal Calcutta Golf Club** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24731288; rcgc2vsnl.net; 18 Golf Club Rd) was established in 1829, making it the oldest golf club in the world outside Britain. Foreign guests unaccompanied by a member pay US\$50 for an 18-hole round, but will need their own clubs.

Volunteering

Several organisations welcome foreign volunteers (see p1160).

COURSES

Cooking

Kali Travel Home (opposite) can arrange highly recommended three-hour Bengali cooking courses (US\$14) led by local housewives in their homes. Three-days advance notice is usually required.

Meditation & Dance

The peaceful **Aurobindo Bhawan** (Map p494; ☎ 22822162; 8 Shakespeare Sarani) offers free, half-hour **meditation sessions** (☎ 7pm Thu & Sun) and various **classical Indian dance lessons** (Rs 100-150; ☎ 4pm): Orissan (Monday), Bharatnatyam (Thursday), Kathak (Friday and Saturday).

Yoga

Five-day yoga courses are organised by the **Art of Living** (☎ 24631018; aolkol@vsnl.net) at varying locations. Call well ahead for details.

KOLKATA FOR CHILDREN

Kolkata has two excellent hands-on places to really experience practical science. The **Birla Industrial & Technological Museum** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 22477241; 18A Gurusaday Rd; admission Rs 15; ☎ 10am-5.30pm) has loads of buttons to press and levers to pull, though some older galleries need re-pairing. The more dramatic **Science City** (Map pp488-9; ☎ 23434343; EM Bypass; admission Rs 20, rides Rs 10-40; ☎ 9am-9pm) is arranged like a theme park. Spherical, spiral and up-turned hemispherical buildings create a futuristic skyline around a thought-provoking physics garden. Twice hourly the Time Machine (Rs 10) gives short, sci-fi themed simulator rides, the Mirror-Maze is brilliantly disorientating and Evolution Park (Rs 10) walks you past animatronic dinosaurs in the eerie half dark.

The little **Nehru Children's Museum** (Map p494; ☎ 22483517; 94/1 Chowringhee Rd; adult/child Rs 5/3;

☎ 11am-7pm Wed-Sun, 3-7pm Tue) displays 400 dolls from 37 countries and has colourful dioramas retelling the Hindu epics. **Nicco Park** (☎ 23578101-4; Block BN, Sector 5, Salt Lake City; admission Rs 50, rides Rs 15-40; ☎ 11am-8pm) is a colourful theme park with a roller-coaster, a log flume and various fairground rides attractively arranged around a central lake. Last entry 7pm. Take bus 201 from Belgachia metro.

TOURS

West Bengal Tourism (Map p496; ☎ 22488271; www.westbengaltourism.com; BBD Bagh) operates a full-day city sightseeing tour (Rs 150; hdeparts 7.30am daily) that includes Belur Math, Dakshineswar temple and Eden Gardens. It arranges Hooghly River charter boats and runs special cruises during the Durga Puja festival (p487) to see the immersion of the idols. Two-day/one-night trips to the Sunderbans Tiger Reserve (p517) cost Rs 1200 to 3600 per head, including permits.

Enthusiastic expats at **Kali Travel Home** (☎/fax 25587980; www.traveleastindia.com) offer accompanied city walks and longer customised tours around Bengal, Darjeeling and Sikkim.

SLEEPING

The great majority of foreigner-accepting budget accommodation is around the Sudder St traveller area. Standards vary wildly, but that area also offers some perfectly decent midrange hotels for around half the cost of equivalent standards elsewhere in Kolkata. Business travellers generally prefer southern Chowringhee or outer Kolkata.

Looks can be deceptive. Some bright façades mask lacklustre crash pads. Other great places are hidden within buildings that look like crumbling wrecks. Décor degrades fast in this climate, so the best choice is generally whichever was most recently renovated.

In summer you can get big off-season discounts, but AC will be virtually essential. In winter fan rooms are fine but demand is high, so you might just have to take whatever's available. Top-end hotels often cost less than half the rack-rate when booked through internet discounters. Taxes and service charges vary so widely (0% to 25%) that for fairness these have been included in our listed prices.

Most cheaper places lock their gates around 11pm so if planning to be late, forewarn the staff. Check-out time is 10am at several budget hotels.

Sudder & Park St Areas

The following places appear on Map p494.

BUDGET

If all our suggestions are full, there are dozens more similarly priced places within a stone's throw.

Salvation Army Red Shield Guest House (☎ 225 20599; 2 Sudder St; dm Rs 70, d with shared/private bathroom from Rs 150/250) Popular rooms and dingy, sex-segregated dorms are made much more palatable by the relaxing upstairs lounge area.

Centrepoint Guest House (☎ 22528184; ian_ra shid@yahoo.com; 20 Mirza Ghalib St; dm Rs 80, s/d from Rs 200/250) The whole 4th floor is a sprawling bunk-bed dormitory that's brighter than most. Good for early risers.

Times Guest House (☎ 22521796; 3 Sudder St; s/d Rs 100/250) First impressions are highly off-putting but the double rooms are actually decent value with bathroom and natural light. Singles are basic with shared toilets. Above the Zurich Café,

Tourist Inn (☎ 22523134; 1st fl, 4/1 Sudder St; s/d with shared bathroom Rs 120/240, q with bathroom Rs 500, d with AC Rs 800-1200; ☎) In a creaky old house, this comparatively inviting cheapie also has two AC rooms with excellent bathrooms, mosaic floors and fully renovated interiors that bring out their colonial-era appeal.

Paragon Hotel (☎ 22522445; 2 Stuart Lane; dm Rs 80, s/d with shared bathroom from Rs 130/180, s/d with private bathroom from Rs 260/300) The narrow courtyard and open roof areas are such good places to meet fellow travellers that few seem to mind the jam-packed dorms or grotty, minuscule rooms. Bring your own padlock.

Modern Lodge (☎ 22524960; 1 Stuart Lane; r with shared/private bathroom from Rs 150/250) Not modern at all, but remarkably good value. The unusually well-kept, simple rooms have high ceilings, but fans and lamps share a single switch in cheaper rooms. No in-room plugs for battery charging.

Continental Guesthouse (☎ 22520663; Sudder St; s/d Rs 150/200, with toilet Rs 300/350) Good tiling but some peeling paint in the better rooms and the lower ceilings upstairs. Hot water by bucket.

Hotel Maria (☎ 22520860, 22224444; 5/1 Sudder St; s/d with shared bathroom Rs 150, s with private bathroom Rs 220, d with private bathroom Rs 250-300; ☎) Somewhat mouldering but pleasantly set in a green courtyard. On-site Internet room available.

Timestar Hotel (☎ 22528028; 2 Tottie Lane; s/d from Rs 175/300) This crumbling colonial mansion

house has grubby walls but newly tiled floors in the bathrooms.

Hotel Neelam (☎ 22269198; 11 Kyd St; s/d from Rs 200/350) Another once-grand colonial mansion that was recently repainted but not remodelled. Huge, creaky rooms have shared basic bathrooms.

Milan Guest House (☎ 30228621; 1st fl, 33/3 Mirza Ghalib; s/d Rs 200/300; 🚽) Of many lacklustre budget places crammed into the same uninspiring side alley, the Milan is marginally the best value. Rooms are windowless and tend to overheat but are unusually well tended for the price. Optional AC costs Rs 300 extra.

Capital Guest House (☎ 22520598; 11B Chowringhee Lane; s with shared bathroom Rs 250-290, d with private bathroom from Rs 350-390; 🚽) As charming as a prison, but with so many rooms that there's hope of a vacancy when other places are full.

MIDRANGE

Hotel VIP InterContinental (☎ 22520150; fax 22293715; 44 Mirza Ghalib St; fan s/d Rs 400/550, with AC from Rs 800/1000; 🚽) Of three close-by 'VIP' hotels, the friendly little InterContinental has the best-value rooms, attractive with new moulded ceilings, marble floors and smart, small bathrooms. It's virtually unsigned beside a piano-restaurant shop.

Pioneer International (☎ 222520057; 1st fl, 1 Marquis St; d without/with AC Rs 450/650) The aged house is rotting and the wobbly wooden stairway unappetizing, but within, the hotel's six rooms are remarkably neat with new tiled floors. Reasonable value.

our pick Sunflower Guest House (☎ 22299401; 4th fl, 7 Royd St; s/d with fan Rs 600/650, d with AC Rs 850) One of Kolkata's best-kept accommodation secrets hides unexpectedly excellent rooms whose freshly tiled bathrooms have new geysers. It's within the archaic-looking 1865 Solomon Mansions building. Ride up in a wonderfully original if grimy 1940s lift with 2006 workings. The urbane owner might invite you to his private rooftop garden.

Hotel Gulshan Palace (☎ 22521009; www.gulshan group.com; 42B Mirza Ghalib St; AC s/d from Rs 660/780; 🚽) Decent value despite rather offish management. Deluxe rooms have two-tone wooden furniture and pleasant curtains.

Jaapon Guest House (☎ 22520657; jaapon_001@yahoo.com; 30F Mirza Ghalib St; s/d from Rs 660/880; 🚽) This very friendly, all-AC mini-hotel is tucked away in a small alley. Some walls are slightly scuffed and lower rooms a little dark, but

upper-floor deluxe rooms (s/d Rs 1100/1300) are a good choice.

Super Guest House (☎ 22520995; super_guest house@hotmail.com; 30A Mirza Ghalib St; d 660-990; 🚽) Good, brightly decorated rooms with AC are dotted about three separate but very close-by locations.

Chowringhee YMCA (☎ 22521017; fax 22492234; 25 Chowringhee Rd; s/d Rs 700/1000 plus Rs 50 'membership'; 🚽) Surely Kolkata's strangest accommodation, the YMCA has large, beautifully redecorated rooms with optional AC (Rs 250 extra). But reaching them takes you through a nightmarishly run-down Victorian building that would make an ideal setting for a cop-movie shoot-out scene. No reception, per se. Weird.

CKT Inn (☎ 22520130; fax 22520665; 3rd fl, 12/1 Lindsay St; s/d Rs 825/1100; 🚽) In an office building with central AC and a lift, CKT furniture's has some slight '50s-style quirks and the water is usually hot. A pleasantly calm choice despite slightly rucked carpets.

Hotel Presidency Inn (☎ 22520057; www.hotelpresidencyinn.com; 2/1 Marquis St; s/d from Rs 900/1020; 🚽 📺) A blue-glass exterior conceals decent rooms with marble floors, pseudo antique flourishes and a fresh flower on arrival. Pricier rooms (Rs 1620) are larger but not significantly better.

Hotel Majestic International (☎ 22442266; 12/1 RAK Rd; d Rs 960-1440; 🚽) This reworked old cinema has 40 quiet, comically over-ornate, marble-floored rooms, but many are small and opening the lift doors requires a crowbar!

Ashreen Guest House (☎ 22520889; ashreen_guest house@yahoo.com; 2 Cowie Lane; d Rs 395-495, d with AC Rs 720; 🚽) Possibly Kolkata's best value mini-hotel, the rooms are sparkling clean with some playful interior touches. Rooms from Rs 440 have geysers and 'double ventilation' (ie corner windows) but Rs 395 ones tend to overheat. Service is remarkably proactive and helpful. The associated **Aafreen Tower** (☎ 22293280; aafreen_tower@yahoo.co.in; 9A Kyd St; d Rs 500, d with AC Rs 770; 🚽) is similar but larger with glass elevators.

TOP END

Fairlawn Hotel (☎ 22521510; www.fairlawnhotel.com; 13A Sudder St; s/d US\$52.20/63.80; 🚽) Taking guests since 1936, the Fairlawn is a Raj-era home (built 1783) set behind an attractive garden-café. The hotel's unique sitting room is jammed full of family mementos and photos, but most

rooms, while impeccably clean, are only relatively basic, midrange standard.

Housez 43 (☎ 22276020; housez43@gmail.com; 43 Mirza Ghalib St; s/d from Rs 2750/3300; 📶) This handily central boutique hotel has gone overboard with bright colours and the sake-pot lamps are fun. Rooms are trendy and appealing... at least now that they're new.

Lytton Hotel (☎ 22491872/3; www.lyttonhotelindia.com; 14 Sudder St; standard s/d Rs 2860/3300, deluxe Rs 3080/3850; 📶) This relaxing three-storey hotel has two good restaurants and corridor-décor enlivened by panels of Tiffany-style stained-glass. The fresh deluxe rooms have understated pseudo-period furniture and possibly the cleanest bathtubs in India. Professional, low-key service.

Park Hotel (☎ 22499000; www.theparkhotels.com; 17 Park St; d deluxe/luxury US\$270/303; 📶 📺 📶) If you'd choose the Hard Rock Hotel in Las Vegas, in Kolkata you'll love the Park. Pick the stylishly modern 'luxury' rooms with goldfish-bowl wash basins, pine floors and in-set lighting panels. The lobby is buffeted with live music from Someplace Else pub, while Kolkata's svelte chic-clique sip cocktails at the Aqua bar around a sizeable yet hard-to-find swimming pool.

ourpick OberoiGrand (☎ 22492323; www.oberoikolkata.com; 15 Chowringhee Rd; s/d from US\$303/330; 📶 📺 📶) A marvellous oasis of genteel calm, the Oberoi offers five-star perfection in a magnificent columned palace. Staff anticipate your needs, a sumptuous Banyan Tree spa massages away your problems and trickling fountains welcome you home.

Southern Chowringhee

Southern Chowringhee hotels tend to be pricey, but are very handy for the business district. The following options all appear on Map p494.

Sikkim House (☎ 22815328; 4/1 Middleton St; d/ste Rs 770/1160; 📶) Large, clean but lacking panache, the functional all-AC rooms are especially good value for this pricey part of town.

Old Kenilworth Hotel (Purdey's Inn; ☎ 22825325; 7 Little Russel St; d without/with AC Rs 1800/2475; 📶) Run by the same Anglo-Armenian family since 1948, this is more of a spacious homestay than a hotel. Recently repainted rooms are very large if not overly luxurious. Many have dining areas, sparse '50s-style furniture and unique Heath Robinson-style rope-drag fans on the high ceilings. There's a private lawn, but no restaurant.

The Astor (☎ 22491872/3; http://astorkolkata.com; 15 Shakespeare Sarani; s Rs 3080-3520, d/ste Rs 3850/4400; 📶) Built in 1905, the exterior has the stolid grandeur of an Edwardian nursing home, while stairways display some period furniture and original wrought-iron banisters. Most rooms are comfortable but avoid the cheapest, windowless singles.

Senator Hotel (☎ 22893000; www.thesenatorhotel.com; 15 Camac St; s/d from US\$127/138; 📶) Mid-sized, well-located business hotel with several stylish flourishes. The wood-and-leather bed boards are fashionable, but bathtubs are rather small. Elite rooms (6th floor, US\$195) are brighter with pistachio walls and flat-screen TVs.

Worth considering if seriously discounted online:

Golden Park (Map p494; ☎ 228833939; 13 Ho Chi Minh Sarani; s/d/ste Rs 7150/7590/10890; 📶) The central atrium has a big 3-D Persian-style mural.

Hotel Hindustan International (☎ 22802323; www.hindustan.com; 235/1 AJC Bose Rd; d US\$275-440; 📶 📺 📶) Vast 1960s concrete hotel totally remodelled with parquet floors and sumptuous mattresses. Swimming pool could be cleaner. North-facing rooms somewhat noisy.

Elgin St Area

This area is a good, untouristy base for shopping and dining. All options appear on Map p500.

Hotel Aston (☎ 24863145; hotelaston@gmail.com; 3 Aston Rd; s/d Rs 1200/1440) In a quiet street behind the Samilton Hotel, the Aston's small but vaguely stylish new rooms have excellent marbled bathrooms.

Hotel Gardenia (☎ 24863249; palmantu@hotmail.com; 42/1B Sarat Bose Rd; s/d Rs 960/1320, executive Rs 1320/1560) Beside the colourful Lakshmi Narayan temple, the Gardenia's larger executive rooms are reasonable value and have a low-key sense of modernist style.

Allenby Inn (☎ 24855984; allenbyinn@vsnl.net; 1st fl, 1/2 Allenby St; s/d Rs 3300/3850; 📶) Just 50m southeast of the Forum Mall, this stylishly upmarket guest house has dark-brown décor, green-tiled floors and plenty of abstract art. Some rooms are very large, though towels could be softer.

BBD Bagh Area

Total renovation should majestically revive the iconic 1840s **Great Eastern Hotel** (www.thegrandhotels.net; BBD Bagh) by the time you read this. Others options listed are handy for Chandni Chowk metro. The following are on Map p496.

Bengal Buddhist Association (Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha; ☎ 22117138; Robert St; tw Rs 200) Although intended for Buddhist students, tourists are welcome to rent these very clean, simple rooms with fan, mosquito nets and spotless shared bathrooms (cold water). Quiet location off a small courtyard.

Broadway Hotel (☎ 22363930; 1 http://business.vsnl.com/broadway; 27A Ganesh Chandra Ave; s/d/t Rs 445/545/700) Well-preserved old furniture gives the lovingly cleaned rooms a vaguely 1950s feel veering unintentionally towards the retro-trendy.

Hotel Embassy (☎ 22379040; ssa@cal.vsnl.net.in; 27 Princep St; s/d Rs 660/880, renovated s/d Rs 990/1320; 🏠) In Kolkata's answer to New York's Flatiron Building, the Embassy has sad, sick-green corridors leading to rather better rooms. Choose the well-maintained, un-renovated ones whose old-yet-appealing feel is similar to equivalents at Hotel Broadway but with added AC. Slicker renovated rooms have less character and some damp patches.

Gypsy Inn (☎ 22126650; 2nd fl, 2 Chandni Chowk St; d non-AC/AC Rs 400/660; 🏠) Brightly whitewashed new rooms have geysers if little style. Enter via the stairway behind that of similar **Esplanade Chambers** (☎ 22127101; s/d from Rs 660/880; 🏠).

Howrah Train Station Area

Within a five-minute walk of the station there are numerous budget and lower midrange options. Chaotic traffic means that most suffer from deafening road noise, but there are two relatively peaceful budget exceptions. Both appear on Map pp488–9.

our pick Howrah Hotel (☎ 26413878; www.thehowrahhotel.com; 1 Mukhran Kanoria Rd; s/tr/q with shared bathroom Rs 125/270/380, d with shared bathroom Rs 205, s/tr/q with private bathroom Rs 215/370/485, d with private bathroom Rs 255-430) Luxury it ain't but this 1890 mansion has loads of character for such an ultra-budget place. The brilliantly antiquated reception has featured in three movies and the inner courtyard is an unexpected oasis of birdsong. Rooms are rather tatty but basically clean, many retaining original tile work, Italian chequer-board marble floors and high ceilings. The hotel is five minutes' walk from Howrah train station. Enter around the corner from the less appealing Hotel Bhimsain, which shares the same building.

Yatri Niwas (☎ 26601742; Howrah Train Station extension; dm Rs 100, d/tr Rs 350/400, d with AC Rs 500; 🏠) An Esheresque convent-style façade hides a more Soviet interior. Expect a melee at reception

where potential guests must show valid long-distance train tickets. Howrah train station is a five-minute walk. Maximum stay is one night, with check-out by 9am.

Outer Kolkata

All the following options appear on Map pp488–9.

our pick Tollygunge Club (☎ 24732316; www.tollygungeclub.org; d/ste Rs 3030/3704; 🏠) Set in idyllic calm amongst mature trees and golf greens, this otherwise-exclusive colonial-era club rents good, motel-standard guest rooms. Guests get temporary club membership allowing access to the wonderful Raj-era Wills Lounge bar and (except Monday) use of many sporting facilities, including especially reasonable rates for using the golf course. Book ahead.

ITC Sonar Bangla Sheraton Hotel (☎ 23454545; www.itcwelcomgroup.in; EM Bypass; s/d from US\$250/275; 🏠 📺 📺) Proudly eco-friendly, the rectilinear buildings of this 2003 'seven-star resort' are arranged around attractive lily ponds that naturally filter and recycle liquid waste. Luxurious rooms have a slightly Japanese vibe. With excellent restaurants, faultless service and a three-hole minigolf course, the hotel inspired a whole chapter in the paperback *The Weekend-ers: Adventures in Calcutta*. It's inconveniently far from the centre but close to Science City.

Airport Area

Although classier options exist further down VIP Rd, the following are walkably close to the terminals (around 1km): well placed if there's a strike.

Airways Lodge (☎ 25127280; Jessore Rd; s/d from Rs 220/330, with AC Rs 550/660; 🏠) One of several cheapies around Airport Gate 2, the fan rooms are sweltering claustrophobic boxes but the AC rooms are refreshingly cool, with very slight hints of style in the wrought-iron furniture. Covered rooftop restaurant.

Hotel White Palace (☎ 25117402; 28/1 Italgacha Rd; s/d from Rs 770/880; 🏠) This comparatively smart new place is 200m west of Airport Gate 1. Turn off Jessore Rd at a tiny mosque, then walk down the lane opposite the ultra-budget Om Lodge. AC costs Rs 200 extra.

EATING Traveller Cafés

The Sudder St area has several backpacker-friendly places offering comfortably familiar standbys – from banana pancakes (around

Rs 20) to burgers, milkshakes and toasted sandwiches complimented with fresh fruit juices, plus a range of good-value, if slightly unrefined, Indian dishes. These options can be found on Map p494.

Zurich Restaurant (3 Sudder St; mains Rs 14-65; ☎ 6.30am-10.30pm) Convivially comfortable diner atmosphere with good-value thalis (from Rs 35) and explanations of Indian menu items for the uninitiated.

Blue Sky Cafe (Chowringhee Lane; mains Rs 20-140; ☎ 6.30am-10pm; ♿) Stylish high-backed zinc chairs at long glass tables encourages conversation amongst fellow travellers.

Fresh & Juicy (Chowringhee Lane; mains Rs 25-60; ☎ 6.30am-10pm) Five-table café lacking any décor but offering great value, with good food and excellent banana lassis.

Restaurants

The *Times Food Guide* (Rs 75) lists hundreds of restaurants, though reviews are suspiciously uncritical. Most restaurants levy a 12.5% tax and some posher places add a further 10% 'service charge'. Tips are welcome at cheaper places and expected at most expensive restaurants.

BENGALI

Bengali cuisine is a wonderful discovery, with a whole new vocabulary of names and flavours (see the boxed text, below). Portion sizes are typically small, so order two or three dishes, along with rice and sweet tomato-*khejur* (date palm) chutney.

Radhuni (Map p494; 176 Mirza Ghalib St; dishes Rs 15-80, rice Rs 8; ☎ 7.30am-11pm) Cheap, unpretentious place for local breakfasts and surprisingly creditable Bengali food.

ourpick Bhojohari Manna (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24401933; www.bhojohorimanna.org; 9/18 Ekdalia Rd

aka PC Sorcan Sarani; dishes Rs 15-170; ☎ noon-9pm; ♿) Already an urban legend, this tiny restaurant-cum-takeaway serves absolutely sublime Bengali food at prices so reasonable you can just keep tasting. The *mochar ghonto* (Rs 25) is pure perfection. Gently spicy *chingri malaikari* (Rs 130) contains a prawn so big it speaks lobster. Sketches on the walls are by celebrated film-director Satyajit Roy's dad. Get near on tram 24 from Kalighat metro to Gariahat Rd.

Rupasi Bangla (Map p494; 1/1C Ripon St; dishes Rs 20-125, lunch thali Rs 55; ☎ noon-11pm) Cane, glass and wrought-iron furniture create a low-key but gently stylish ambiance in which to savour a great range of genuine Bengali cuisine. Friendly management can help you decipher unfamiliar menu terms.

Kewpies (Map p500; ☎ 24759880; 2 Elgin Lane; dishes Rs 50-170, thalis Rs 155-285; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 7.30-11pm Tue-Sun) Dining at Kewpies is almost like being invited to a dinner party in the chef's eclectic, gently old-fashioned home. First-rate Bengali food comes in small but fairly priced portions (minimum charge Rs 200 per person). Find it down the tiny alley beside Netaji Bhawan.

CHINESE

South of Sudder St, several places on Mirza Ghalib St serve Chinese food, including cheap-if-bland Hong Kong, midrange Golden Dragon and very swish Tung Fong.

Song Hay (Map p496; ☎ 22480974; 3 Waterloo St; lunch mains Rs 25-70, dinner mains Rs 44-150; ☎ 9am-10.30pm; ♿) This modest, family restaurant looks pretty dowdy but serves prize-winning real Chinese food at very reasonable prices.

Mainland China (Map p500; ☎ 22837964; 3A Gurusaday Rd; mains Rs 150-600, rice Rs 90; ☎ 12.30-3.30pm & 7-11.30pm) World-class Chinese food in gently sophisticated surroundings. Superb lobster-

BENGALI CUISINE

Fruity and mildly spiced, Bengali food favours the sweet, rich notes of jaggary (palm sugar), *daab* (young coconut), *malaikari* (coconut milk) and *posto* (poppy seed). *Chingri* (river prawns) and excellent fish (particularly *bhekti* and *ilish*) are more characteristic than meat. Mustard fans will savour *bhekti paturi* (fish steamed in banana leaf). Excellent vegetarian choices include *mochar ghonto* (mashed banana-flower, potato and coconut) and *doi begun* (brinjal mini-eggplants in creamy sauce). Rice or sometimes *luchi* (small puris) are the usual accompaniment. A traditional soft drink is *aampora shorbat* made from cooked green mangoes with added lime zing.

Bengali desserts and sweets are legendary. Most characteristic is *mishti dhoi* (curd sweetened with jaggary), best when the crust dries to a fudge texture leaving the remainder lusciously moist.

A vast selection of recipes and a very handy five-page Bengali menu decoder can be found at http://milonee.net/bengali_recipes/list.html.

lemongrass soup (Rs 120), acceptable dim-sum (Rs 110 to 130) and unusually drinkable Indian wines, notably the Sula Sauvignon Blanc (Rs 190 per glass). Reservations advised, enter behind Barista Coffee.

THAI

Many restaurants serve pseudo-Thai food, but for the real thing visit the calm **Dynasty Restaurant** (1st fl, Lytton Hotel, 14 Sutton St; mains Rs 85-260) or splurge at the world-class **Baan Thai** (Oberoi Grand, 15 Chowringhee Rd; mains Rs 250-600).

MULTICUISINE

Eating your way along Park St's many fine dining options could take weeks. Several restaurants are fashionably hip but the old faithfuls often turn out more reliable fare.

Peter Cat (Map p494; ☎ 22298841; Middleton Row; mains Rs 75-140, beers Rs 80-100; ☎ 11am-11.30pm; ♿) Opposite KFC, this phenomenally popular Kolkata institution offers top-quality Indian cuisine, fizzing sizzlers, great chelo-kebabs and beers quaffed from pewter tankards. Waiters wear Rajasthani costumes in an atmosphere redolent of a mood-lit 1970s steakhouse.

Mocambo (Map p494; ☎ 22175372; Mirza Ghalib St; mains Rs 80-200; ☎ 11.30am-11.30pm) Although somewhat old-fashioned, reliable kebabs and European dishes like creamy Chicken Tetrazini ensure a very loyal following.

Bar-B-Q (Map p494; ☎ 22299078; 43 Park St; mains Rs 85-140, rice Rs 70, beers Rs 80; ☎ noon-4.30pm & 7-11pm) This enduring family favourite offers truly delicious Indian and Chinese food in separate nearby sections. Genteel head waiters are sharp-witted but obliging and décor is comfortably unpretentious.

On Track (Map p494; ☎ 22273955; Mirza Ghalib St; mains Rs 90-180; ☎ 11am-3pm & 7-11pm) An almost full-sized steam train heads straight for the window offering parents a unique, upmarket dining experience in leather-seated Pullman carriages while the kids play in the locomotive. Over-keen waiters flock like vultures, but food standards vary.

Oh! Calcutta (Map p500; ☎ 22837161; 4th fl, Forum Shopping Mall, Elgin Rd; mains Rs 150-650, rice Rs 75; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 7.15-11pm) High-class Bengali, Mughlai and continental cuisine in a suave pseudo-colonial atmosphere that's a delightfully calm contrast to the brash modernity of the surrounding mall.

Amber/Essence (Map p496; ☎ 22483477; 1st & 2nd fl, 11 Waterloo St; mains Rs 120-200; ☎ 1.30pm-11pm) The

reliable Indian and continental food is the same on different floors but the slightly pricier 2nd-floor dining room has the nicer décor, being upmarket yet relaxed, with trendy grey-and-orange back-lit panelling.

Ivory (Map p494; ☎ 22811313; www.ivorykitchen.com/kol/; 5th fl, Block D, 22 Camac St; mains Rs 215-285, prawn mains Rs 400-500; ☎ noon-3pm & 7-11pm; ♿) Fashionably suave Indian, Chinese and continental dining with some of the most original curries in town, originally dreamt up by India's leading celebrity chef. Excellent lunch buffets Rs 390 to 455.

INDIAN REGIONAL

Aminia (Map p496; Hogg St; mains Rs 25-55; ☎ 10.30am-10.30pm) This bright but old-fashioned budget eatery has high ceilings and more under-employed staff than there are menu items. Curries are tasty if greasy. Tandoori chicken costs just Rs 25 per quarter.

Drive Inn (Map p494; 10 Middleton St; mains Rs 30-60; ☎ 1-10pm) Plate-lickingly good Indian vegetarian food served in a modest open-air 'garden' with simple fan-pavilion tables. Try the stuffed capsicum.

Only Parathas (Map p494; ☎ 30588841; Lord Sinha Rd; mains Rs 36-150; ☎ noon-11pm; ♿) Calm and relatively stylish, this new restaurant offers high-quality Punjabi vegetarian food, including (but not limited to) 133 types of *paratha* (bread).

Chennai Kitchen (Map p496; ☎ 22488509; P15/1 Chowringhee Sq; dosas Rs 25-55, thali Rs 69; ☎ noon-10pm Tue-Sun) Remarkably good South Indian food served in a stylishly retro-modernist diner-style atmosphere with glass waterfall, designer steel servingware and glass tables inlaid with spice designs.

ourpick Teej (Map p494; ☎ 22170730; 2 Russel St; mains Rs 110-250, thalis Rs 150-250, house thali Rs 250; ☎ noon-3.30pm & 7-10.45pm; ♿) Above a good sweet shop and Dominos pizzeria, this wonderfully atmospheric place has been superbly painted with Mughlai-style designs to look like a Rajasthani *haveli* (merchant's house). The excellent, 100% vegetarian food is predominantly Rajasthani, too. Superb Paneer Sartaj.

ITALIAN & TEX-MEX

Jalapenos (Map p494; 10 Wood St; mains Rs 85-185; ☎ 11.30am-10.15pm; ♿) Approximations of Mexican food along with some pseudo-Lebanese and Italian offerings in a pleasant if unremarkable interior.

Pizza Hut (Map p494; ☎ 22814343; 22 Camac St; pizzas Rs 90-415; ☎ 11am-11pm) Popular with travellers seeking a taste of home.

Fire and Ice (Map p494; ☎ 22884057; Kanak Bldg, Middleton St; mains Rs 160-300, beers Rs 100; ☎ 11am-11pm; 🍷) Modern Italian restaurant offering real pastas and pricey fresh-ground Italian coffee. Red designer ducting runs along high ceilings, while self-consciously handsome wait-staff sport black shirts, white aprons and bandanas.

Quick Eats

Snacks stalls (Map p494; Bertram St & Humayan Pl; snacks Rs 10-45; ☎ 10am-9pm) abound around New Market with puris on Bertram St, pastries round the corner outside CitiMart, espressos and pizza within the New Empire cinema, and great dosas, fresh juices and *momos* directly opposite across Humayan Pl. For baked potatoes, cheap biriyani, chow mein and Rs 30 curry roti, look down nearby Madge Lane or further east around the Collin St/Ripon St junction triangle.

Türkisch Çöner (Map p494; Mirza Ghalib St 43; kebabs Rs 25-40; ☎ 10am-10pm) Takeaway kebabs, falafels and small but delicious shwarmas along with fascinating stories of the chef's escape from Iraq.

ROLL HOUSES

Bengal's trademark fast food is the *kati roll*. No, that's nothing like a bread roll. Take a paratha roti, fry it with a one-sided coating of egg then fill with sliced onions, chilli and your choice of stuffing – typically curried chicken, grilled meat or *paneer* (unfermented cheese). Roll it up in a twist of paper and it's ready to eat, generally on the street. Roll houses are usually just hole-in-the-wall serveries, like revered **Hot Kati Rolls** (Map p494; 1/1 Park St; rolls Rs 15-35; ☎ 11am-10.30pm). But the classic, recently relaunched 1932 roll house **Nizams** (Map p496; 23/24 Hogg St; rolls Rs 15-60, kebabs Rs 55-80; ☎ noon-11pm) has seating along with faintly *Tintin*-esque cartoon décor.

SWEETS, CAKES & PASTRIES

Ubiquitous Bengali sweet shops often also serve snack meals.

KC Das (Map p496; Lenin Sarani; sweets from Rs 10; ☎ 7.30am-9.30pm) This historic, if not especially atmospheric, Bengali sweet shop invented *rasgulla* (syrupy sponge balls) in 1868.

Jarokha/Gupta Brothers (Map p494; www.guptabros.com; Park Mansion, Mirza Ghalib St; sweets Rs 3-10; mains

Rs 70-100; ☎ 7.30am-10.30pm) A wooden spiral stairway leads up to a haveli-style vegetarian dining room above this celebrated Bengali sweet shop.

Kookie Jar (Map p494; Rowden St; cakes from Rs 10; ☎ 8am-10pm) Kolkata's most heavenly cakes and brownies along with great pizza slices. No seating, but there are cafés next door.

Kathleen Confectioners (Map p494; 12 Mirza Ghalib St; snacks Rs 5-25; ☎ 8am-8pm) Appealing stand-and-eat chain bakery serving delicious savoury pastries and sickly sweet cake slices. There are many other branches, including one on AJC Bose Rd.

FOOD PLAZAS

Several comfortable outlets – organised fast-food-style – serve wide varieties of cuisines including regional Indian, continental and Chinese:

Burp! (Map p500; 5th fl, Forum Shopping Mall, Elgin Rd; Rs 20-70; ☎ 10.30am-10pm) Twelve-unit food court cooking up almost anything. Use a prepaid cashcard (refundable deposit Rs 20)

Food First (Map p494; 5 Camac St; ☎ 7.30am-11pm) Options include Nachos and Roesti.

Haldirans (Map p494; Chowringhee Rd; Rs 30-85; ☎ 10.30am-9.30pm) Great thalis and Bengalis sweets.

Ridhi Sidhi (Map p494; Emami Shopping Centre, 3 Lord Sinha Rd; mains Rs 20-40; ☎ 9.30am-10pm) *Momos*, dosas, chow mein.

DRINKING

Coffee & Tea Shops

COFFEE

Flury's (Map p494; Park St; coffees Rs 30-55, cakes Rs 45-115; ☎ 7.30am-9.45pm; 🍷) This wonderfully enticing Art Deco palace-café serves unusual, semi-sweet Belgian Mocha coffee and offers all-day breakfasts (Rs 100 to 200), but sandwiches and croissants aren't always fresh.

Ashalayam (Map p494; www.ashalayam.org; 1st fl, 44 Mirza Ghalib St; coffee Rs 6; ☎ 10.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-2pm Sat; 🍷) Calm, bright little charity craft-shop café serving cheap machine-frothed Nescafé (see p511).

Indian Coffee House (Map pp488-9; upper floors, 15 Bankim Chatterjee St; coffee Rs 7; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat) Once a meeting place of freedom fighters, bohemians and revolutionaries, this legendary place has crusty high ceilings, archaic fans and grimy walls ringing with deafening student conversation. It's perversely fascinating despite bland chow meins (Rs 25) and dishwasher coffee.

Increasingly ubiquitous, the Starbucks-style chains **Barista** (Map p494; Humayan Pl; coffees Rs 24-50; ☎ 9am-10pm; ☎) and **Cafe Coffee Day** (Map p494; 18K Park St; coffees Rs 20-50; ☎ 10.30am-11pm; ☎) are reliably youthful places to linger in air-conditioned comfort. Both have numerous alternative branches (see maps).

TEA

our pick Dolly's Tea Shop (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24224650; Unit G62, Dakshinapan Shopping Centre, 2 Gariahat Rd; teas Rs 10-30, snacks Rs 15-50; ☎ 10.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-2.30pm Sat) If shopping at Dakshinapan, don't miss this characterful teahouse offering 24 different infusions and as many iced flavours. Regal matriarch Dolly is a tea writer-researcher whose magnetic presence attracts a wonderfully eclectic clientele.

Camellia Tea Bar (Map p500; 1st fl, Samilton Hotel, 37 Sarat Bose Rd; teas Rs 18-30; ☎ 6.30am-11.30pm) Multifarious teas served cocktail-style on a roof-garden. Try spicy Thai-chai or curious Irish Tea with ice-cream float.

Bars

Kolkata has an increasingly cutting-edge cocktail bar scene for those with thick wallets, but cheaper places are usually dingy and almost inevitably attract a 100% male clientele. Places in all ranges have a penchant for over-loud music.

Broadway Bar (Map p496; Broadway Hotel, 27A GC Ave; beers Rs 60; ☎ 11am-10.15pm) Back-street Paris? Chicago 1930s? Prague 1980s? This cavernous, unpretentious old pub defies easy parallels but has a compulsive left-bank fascination. Cheap booze, 20 ceiling fans, grimy walls, marble floors and, thankfully, no music. Clientele 100% male.

Fairlawn Hotel (Map p494; 13A Sudder St; beers Rs 80; ☎ 12.45-2pm & 7.30-9.30pm) Waving palms and an ideal location make the historic Fairlawn's calm garden café the perfect travellers place for a cold brew (no spirits).

Mirch Masala (Map pp488-9; ☎ 24618900; 49/2 Gariahat Rd; mains Rs 80-140, beers Rs 90; ☎ noon-3pm & 7am-10.30pm) Drinks and North Indian food served in a striking environment that's feels like a Bollywood Tex-Mex joint. Half a taxi-chassis has been added for good measure. Enter beneath Hotel Park Palace on Garcha 1st Lane, behind Pantaloons department store.

Blue & Beyond Restaurant (Map p494; 10th fl, Lindsay Hotel, Lindsay St; beers Rs 95, mains Rs 70-275; ☎ 12.30-10.30pm) Come for the fabulous views over New

Market from the open-air rooftop terrace. Views are even better from the 9th-floor elevator landing.

Copper Chimney Lounge (Map p494; ☎ 22834161; 31 Shakespeare Sarani; beers Rs 110; ☎ noon-11pm; ☎) Chic 21st-century neo-Ottoman bar with hookah water pipes (Rs 150), shimmering string-curtain dividers and mesmerising lighting effects. It's above a highly rated eponymous restaurant, behind HSCB bank. DJ on weekends.

Chowringhee Bar (Map p494; Oberoi Grand Hotel; beers Rs 120; ☎) Not quite the colonial delight one might hope, but there's pleasant lighting, pool tables and soft live jazz some evenings. The next-door coffee shop stays open 24 hours.

Rocks (Map p496; 9 Waterloo St; beers Rs 120; ☎ 11am-midnight; ☎) Three floors of bars guarded by snarling bouncers. The top has the most inviting décor, its wavy ceiling inset with 'stars'. The live Bengali music is high quality but has an even higher decibel level. Predominantly male clientele.

Roxy (Map p494; Park Hotel; small beer Rs 120; ☎ 6-11pm; ☎) With a *Clockwork Orange* retro-futuristic atmosphere, Roxy is the best (and most expensive) of several fun pub-bars around and within the Park Hotel, including Someplace Else and Aqua Bar.

ENTERTAINMENT Nightclubs

Kolkata's high-voltage nightclubs are mostly within top hotels. Variable cover charges range Rs 300 to 1000 per couple, commonly redeemable for drinks of the same value. Single women often go free but single men (known as 'stags') are generally excluded unless a guest at the hotel.

Tantra (Map p494; Park Hotel; ☎ 7pm-4am Wed & Fri, 7am-midnight Thu, 4pm-4am Sat & Sun; ☎) The city's top spot. The relatively small but throbbing dance floor faces an alluring if not-so-quiet chill-out zone across the large central island of bar.

Marrakech (Map p494; Cinnamon Restaurant, 1st fl, 24 Park St; cover Rs 500, beers Rs 135; ☎ 6pm-midnight Mon-Thu, 6pm-2am Fri-Sun; ☎) Appealingly Moroccan-themed club-bar with small dance floor. DJs crank up the volume after 10pm.

For 'stags' the best hope is **Venom** (Map p494; 8th fl, Fort Knox, 6 Camac St; ☎ 6pm-2am). If you don't get in, right beside it is DJ-bar **Little High** (Map p494; 8th fl, Fort Knox, 6 Camac St; no cover, beer Rs 100, hookah Rs 200; ☎ 7pm-midnight; ☎), which lacks a dance floor but spins similar contemporary sounds.

Cultural Programmes

Kolkata's famous poetry, music, art, film and dance are regularly showcased at the Nandan Complex (AJC Bose Rd) comprising the **Rabindra Sadan** (Map p494; ☎ 22239936) and **Sisir Mancha** (Map p494; ☎ 22235317) theatre halls and an art-house cinema. Tourist Information offices and pamphlets (p492) give extensive listings of events here and at many other venues.

Cinemas

Cinemas are ubiquitous with at least nine around New Market alone.

Globe (Map p494; ☎ 22495636; Madge Lane) Great art-deco façade

Inox (Map p500; ☎ 23584499; 4th fl, Forum Shopping Mall, 10/3 Elgin Rd; tickets Rs 140-230) Modern multiplex.

Nandan Cinema (Map p494; ☎ 22231210; 1/1A AJC Bose Rd) For more intellectual, art-house films.

New Empire Cinema (Map p494; ☎ 22491299; 1-2 Humayan Pl)

Spectator Sports

Kolkata is sports mad. Dozens of clubs on the Maidan practise everything from cricket to kabaddi, especially at weekends. Even if you don't know Ganguly from a googly, the electric atmosphere of an international **cricket** match at Ranji Stadium in Eden Gardens is an unforgettable experience.

Arguably India's best place to watch **horse racing** is from the 19th-century grandstands at **Maidan racecourse** (☎ 22291104; www.rctonline.com; ☎ 12.30-3.20pm Nov-mid-Apr), the Victoria Memorial providing a beautiful backdrop. Over 40 meets annually; days vary. Enter from Acharya Jagdish Rd for the **main stands** (admission Rs 14).

SHOPPING

New Market has a grand colonial clocktower, but by day it's a pestilential nest of handicraft touts. Come before 8am, while touts are sleeping, to calmly appreciate the adjacent Hogg Market (fresh food and live chickens). Traditional, ultra-crowded shopping alleys spread in confusing profusion north of BBD Bagh, progress being slightly more manageable along Rabindra Sarani, which offers intriguing thematic groupings of trades at different points. Many Kolkatans prefer to shop in the southerly Gariahat district.

For more Western-style retail therapy, the five-storey **Forum Shopping Mall** (Map p500; Elgin Rd) is as good (or as bad) as small American equivalents. **Metro Shopping Centre** (Map p494;

Ho Chi Minh Sarani) is similar, **22 Camac** (Map p494; 22 Camac St) is snobbier, while **Emami Shoppers' City** (Map p494; 3 Lord Sinha Rd) is unthreateningly suburban.

Crafts & Souvenirs

GOVERNMENTAL EMPORIA

For good-quality souvenirs at decent fixed prices, head to the state-government emporia. A large number are gathered at **Dakshinapan Shopping Centre** (Map pp488-9; Gariahat Rd; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat), which, along with Dolly's Tea Shop (opposite), just about justifies the long trek to this soul-crushing monstrosity of 1970s architecture. The fabrics are particularly good value and the Tripura Emporium has great deals on bamboo- and cane-ware.

Similar if dustier cane-ware is available more centrally at **Assam Craft Emporium** (Map p494; ☎ 22298331; Assam House, 8 Russel St; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat). **Nagaland Emporium** (11 Shakespear Sarani; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) sells Naga crafts, including traditional shawls. (Rs 300 to 1500) and double-face bronze 'trophy' necklaces for wannabe head-hunters.

Several more government emporia can be found along Chowringhee Rd, including the impressive if comparatively pricey **Central Cottage Industries Emporium** (Map p496; www.cot tageemporiumindia.com; Metropolitan Bldg, 7 Chowringhee Rd; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) showcasing handicrafts from right across India.

Towards Salt Lake City, **Swabhami** (Map pp488-9; www.swabhami.com; admission Rs 20; ☎ noon-10pm) is a shopping centre-cum-cultural park with dozens of well-stocked craft stalls and boutiques plus rather dubious 'cultural performances'.

CHARITY COOPERATIVES

Buy gifts and support great causes:

Ankur Kala (Map pp488-9; ☎ 22478476; www.ankurkala.org; 76 Park St) Handicrafts from a cooperative training centre, empowering women from the slums.

Ashalayam (Map p494; www.ashalayam.org) Super greetings cards, handmade paper and fabrics funding the (ex)street kids who made them (see p509).

Women's Friendly Society (Map p494; 29 Park Lane; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Hand-embroidered tableware, fabrics and children's clothes from another cooperative society for destitute women (founded 1886).

Clothing

Kolkata is great value for tailored or off-the-peg clothing, with smart shirts at just Rs 100

from Chowringhee Rd Hawkers Market. The choice around Newmarket is endless.

Music

Peddlers sell Bengali pop CDs on street corners, but for a vast selection of genres visit the flashy, AC chain shops **Music World** (Map p494; cnr Park St & Middleton Row; ☎ 10am-9pm) or **Planet M** (Map p494; Block B, 22 Camac St; ☎ 10.30am-8.30pm).

Musical Instruments

Shops and workshops along Rabindra Sarani sell a great range of musical instruments. For tablas and other percussion try numbers 248, 264 and 268B near Tagore's House (p501). For stringed instruments from *esraj* to sitar to violin, shops around number 8 are better. Family run since the 1850s, **Mondal & Sons** (Map p496; 8 Rabindra Sarani; ☎ 10am-6pm) counts Yehudi Menuhin among its satisfied customers.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

See p1167 for international destinations.

Air

Kolkata's **Netaji Subhash Bose International Airport** (NSBIA; ☎ 25118787) offers handy connections to Europe (London, Frankfurt) and several Asian cities. Arrive very early for international flights as security checks can take hours. On strike days (remarkably common) all road transport, including taxis, stops completely between 6am and 6pm, so consider sleeping within walking distance of the terminal before an important flight (see p506). Airline offices are generally open from 9.30am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm Monday to Friday, give or take 15 minutes. A few also open on Saturday.

INTERNATIONAL

International airlines flying out of Kolkata:

Air India (Map p494; ☎ 22822356/59; 50 Chowringhee Rd)

Biman Bangladesh Airlines (Map p494;

☎ 22276001; 55B Mirza Ghalib St)

British Airways (☎ 9831377470)

Cosmic Air (Map p496; ☎ 21121344/39538660; www.cosmicair.com; Room 207/208, 2nd Fl, 25 Black Burn Lane)

Druk Air (Map p500; ☎ 22902429; 3rd fl, block B Tivoli Court, 1A Ballygunge Circular Rd) Thrice-weekly flights to Bhutan and Bangkok. Tickets from RCPL Travels (p492).

Emirates (Map pp488-9; ☎ 40099555, 1-800-2332030; Trinity Tower, 83 Topsis Rd South)

GMG Airlines (Map p494; ☎ 30283030; 12 Park St) Flies to Chittagong and Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Gulf Air (Map p494; ☎ 22837996; Chitrakoot Bldg, 230A AJC Bose Rd)

Lufthansa (☎ 22299365; 8th fl, IBM Tower, Information Technology Park, DN62, Sector 5, Salt Lake City)

Singapore Airlines (Map p494; ☎ 22809898; 2nd fl, 1 Lee Rd)

Thai Airways International (Map p494; ☎ 22838865; 8th fl, Crescent Towers, 229 AJC Bose Rd)

DOMESTIC

Domestic airlines flying out of Kolkata:

Air Sahara (S2; Map p494; ☎ 22826118; 2A Shakespeare Sarani)

Indian Airlines (IC; Map p496; ☎ 22114433; 39 Chittaranjan Ave)

IndiGo (6E; <http://book.goindigo.in>)

Jet Airways (9W; Map p494; ☎ 22292227; www.jetairways.com; 18D Park St)

Kingfisher (IT; www.flyingfisher.com)

spiceJet (SG; <http://book.spicejet.com>)

Boat

Ten days before departure, ferry tickets for Port Blair (Andaman Islands, see p1111) go on sale at the **Shipping Corporation of India** (Map p496; ☎ info 22482354, ticketing 22482141; Hare Rd; ☎ 10.30am-1pm). The ferries depart from **Kidderpore Docks** (Map pp488-9; Karl Marx Sarani), 3km southwest of the centre. Enter at Gate 3, right opposite Kidderpore commuter train station.

Bus

Esplanade bus stand (Map p496) is the departure point for destinations within West Bengal. Buses to Malda (Rs 400, nine hours) leave at 9.30am, 8.30pm and 10pm. For Darjeeling or Sikkim take one of many night buses to Siliguri (Rs 400 to 650, 12 hours), departing between 6pm and 8pm.

From Babughat bus stand (Map pp488-9) beside Eden Gardens commuter train station, many overnight services run to Ranchi, Puri and Bhubaneswar (all from Rs 160, 12 hours) departing between 5pm and 8pm. **Whiteliners** (☎ 24444444) has aircon buses (Rs 450).

For Dhaka (Bangladesh) direct buses depart Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from **Karunamoyee**, Salt Lake City, operated by **Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation** (BRTC; Map p494; 21/A Mirza Ghalib St). Various private services, including **Shyamoli Paribahan** (Map p494; ☎ 22520802; 6/1 Marquis St), run daily (Rs 550, 13 hours), but involve changing vehicles at the Benapol border.

Train

Check carefully whether your train departs from Howrah (Haora; HWH, Map pp488–9) or Sealdah stations (SDAH, Map pp488–9). Both have trains to Delhi and Guwahati, though most longer distance services use Howrah.

Buying tickets is usually easier by internet, through Sudder St agencies or from city-centre booking offices. Indian Railways' **Foreign Tourist Bureau** (Map p496; ☎ 22224206; 6 Fairlie Pl; 🕒 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun) has a tourist quota for most trains ex-Kolkata, but there's usually a queue and you must show foreign-exchange receipts or else pay US dollars, British pounds or euros. Next door and also one block south there are

computerised booking offices (Map p496; ☎ 22227282; 14 Strand Rd South & 6 Fairlie Pl; 🕒 8am–8pm Mon–Sat, 8am–2pm Sun) offering tickets on the wider train network, but you can't access the tourist quota here. Plan ahead. Other **computerised booking offices** (Map pp488–9; 🕒 8am–2pm Mon–Sat) include one just north of Tollygunge Metro station

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

NSBIA Airport is in the northeastern suburbs, some 5km east of Dum Dum metro station. Oddly, trains on the new suburban Airport Line only operate twice daily to Sealdah (Rs 10) at 7am and 9.40pm. Whiteliner Express

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS FROM KOLKATA

Destination	Airline/Frequency	Duration
Agartala	IC twice daily, DN & 9W daily IT MonWedFri via Guwahati	50min 3hr
Ahmedabad	IT MoTuWeFrSun	2¼hr
Aizawl	DN & IC daily	1hr
Bagdogra (Siliguri)	DN & 9W daily, IC TueSat	55min
Bangalore	DN, IC, SG & 9W daily	2¼hr
Bhubaneswar	DN, IC & S2 daily	55min
Chennai	9W twice daily, DN, SG & IC daily	2hr
Delhi	DN, IC, IT, SG, S2, 6E & 9W daily+	2hr
Dibrugarh	IC TuWeThSaSu IT TuThSa via Guwahati DN MoWeFrSu via Guwahati	1½hr 3hr 3hr
Dimapur	IC daily, usually indirect	1–2hr
Gaya	IC Wed	1hr
Guwahati	DN, IC & 9W twice daily 6E, SG, S2 & IT daily	1½hr
Hyderabad	DN, IT, S2 & 9W daily, IC MoWeFr	2hr
Imphal	DN & IC daily 9W MoTuWeFrSa via Guwahati	1¼hr 2¼
Jaipur	6E daily, IC MoTuThSa, IT ThuSat	2½hr
Johrat	9W WedFri 9W ThuSun via Guwahati IC TueSat via Tezpur	1½hr 2¼hr 2¼hr
Lilabari (North Lakhimpur)	DN TuThSa via Guwahati	3hr
Lucknow	S2 daily	2½hr
Mumbai	DN, IC, IT, S2 & 9W twice daily	2½hr
Nagpur	6E daily	1½
Patna	DN & S2 daily	1hr
Port Blair	DN & S2 daily, IC TuThSaSu	2hr
Raipur	DN daily	2½hr
Ranchi	DN twice daily	1hr
Shillong	IC Mon, Wed	1¾hr
Silchar	DN & IC daily	1½hr
Tezpur	IC TueSun	1¼hr

buses from Tollygunge Metro (Rs 25 to 35, 80 minutes) run up to four times hourly between 8.20am and 8.30pm via Gariahat and Salt Lake City. Fixed-price taxis cost Rs 130/210 to Dum Dum metro/Sudder St.

Cheap but crowded options include minibus 151 from Airport Gate 1 (1.2km from the terminals) to BBD Bagh or frequent bus 30B from Airport Gate 2. The latter eventually grinds all the way to Babughat bus stand, but we'd suggest hopping off at Dum Dum station (Rs 5, 25 minutes) and continuing by metro (Rs 6, 20 minutes) to central Kolkata. (Dum Dum road passes Kolkata's original 1848 ordinance factory responsible for infamous hollow-tipped Dum-Dum bullets, internationally banned in 1899.)

Note that Airport Gate 2 is just a pedestrian-sized gateway in the perimeter wall opposite Oasis Lodge (Jessore Rd). From the airport's domestic terminal walk under the elevated railway and continue for around 10 minutes through the discouraging ruins of a derelict school-complex. Just when you think you must be wrong, you reach the outer perimeter road. Across that, beyond a huddle of rickshaws, there's a gap in the wall leading into busy Jessore Rd.

Bus

Local buses are passenger-crammed mechanical monsters hurtling along at frightening speeds

wherever the chronic congestion abates. Routes can be a little confusing (eg 30B isn't the same as 30B/1) but at least Western-script numbers are used. Some buses even have signboards in English. Conductors somehow fight through the crowds to collect fares (Rs 2 to 10).

Ferry

The fastest way from central Kolkata to Howrah train station is generally by river ferry (tickets Rs 4, 8am to 8pm Monday to Saturday). These depart every 15 minutes from Armenian, Fairlie, Bishe June and Babu Ghats. Private and public ferries cost the same. They're packed at rush hour.

Metro

It's as crowded as any underground system at rush hour, but Kolkata's one-line Metro (tickets Rs 4 to 8; 7am to 9.45pm Monday to Saturday, 3pm to 9.45pm Sunday) remains the city's most stress-free form of public transport. Men beware not to sit in assigned 'Ladies' seats. For BBD Bagh use Central or Chandni Chowk stations, for Sudder St area use Esplanade or Park St.

Rickshaw

Kolkata is the last bastion of human-powered 'tana rickshaws', with the greatest concentra-

MAJOR TRAINS FROM KOLKATA

Destination	Train no & name	Fares (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Departures
Bhubaneswar	2073 <i>Shatabdi Exp</i>	CC 147	7	1.35pm Mon-Sat (H)
Chennai	6003 <i>Chennai Mail</i>	2AC/3AC/SL 1973/1264/469	30	9.55pm daily (H)
Delhi	2381 <i>Poorva Exp</i>	2AC/3AC/SL 1811/1163/433	23	9.05am or 9.20am daily (H)
Delhi	2329 <i>Kranti Exp</i>	3AC/SL 1128/419	23	1pm Mon, Fri (S)
Guwahati	5657 <i>Kanchenjunga Exp</i>	2AC/SL 1457/341	22	6.45am daily (S)
Guwahati	<i>Saraighat Exp</i>	2AC/SL 1482/347	18	15.45 Mon, Wed, Thu, Fri, Sun (H)
Mumbai CST	2810 <i>Mumbai Mail</i>	2AC/3AC/SL 2189/1399/517	33	7.55pm daily (H)
New Jalpaiguri	2343 <i>Darjeeling Mail</i>	2AC/3AC/SL 1027/661/245	10	10.05pm daily (S)
New Jalpaiguri	3147/3149 <i>Cooch Behar Exp</i>	2AC/3AC/SL 1027/661/245	12	7.35pm daily (S)
Patna	2023 <i>Lal Quila Exp</i>	2AC/SL 981/235	11	8.10pm daily (S)
Puri	2837 <i>Puri Exp</i>	2AC/3AC/SL 946/611/227	9	10.35 daily (H)
Varanasi	3005 <i>Amritsar Mail</i>	2AC/3AC/SL 1251/801/295	15	7.10pm daily (H)
Varanasi	3133 <i>Sealdah-Varanasi Exp</i>	SL 289	25	8.55pm daily (S)

CC – AC chair-car, 2AC – AC two-tier, 3AC – AC three-tier, SL – non-AC sleeper, H – ex-Haora, S – ex-Sealdah

BANNING RICKSHAWS?

Is it morally unacceptable to have a bare-footed man pulling you around the unsanitary, flooded streets by the sweat of his brow? Some believe so. No new *tana*-rickshaw licenses have been issued for years, and since 2003 the West Bengal administration has pondered outlawing them altogether. But others fear that impoverished rickshaw-wallahs (1800 licensed, many more unofficial) could be pushed into starvation if their business is banned. And are the less-practical cycle-rickshaws really so much kinder?

tion around New Market. During the monsoon the high-wheeled rickshaws can be the only transport able to get through the worst-flooded streets. Although rickshaw pullers sometimes charge foreigners disproportionate fares, many are virtually destitute, sleeping on the pavements beneath their rented chariots at night. Tips are heartily appreciated.

Outside the centre and in Howrah you'll find cycle-rickshaws.

Autorickshaws are not generally for hire but act as share taxis on fixed routes (Rs 4.50 per short hop).

Taxi

Kolkata's ubiquitous yellow Ambassador taxis are surprisingly cheap (from Rs 20 for a shorter trip). But be warned that the fare you pay will be roughly double the reading on the digital meter (or around 3.5 times the reading on now-rare old-style mechanical meters). This is official and not a scam. Exact rates for longer trips are calculated using conversion charts that every driver carries, but handing over twice the meter reading usually works without a fuss. Just make sure the meter's switched on.

A problem of taxi travel is the one-way system. Complex to start with, around 2pm the direction of traffic flow reverses on many roads. Not surprisingly many drivers are reluctant to make journeys around this chaotic time.

Prepaid taxis from a booth in front of Howrah station cost Rs 65 to Sudder St, Rs 190 to the airport.

Tram

Trams cost just Rs 3.50 per hop. The challenge is getting on, as stops aren't marked or set. Route 24 and 29 head from Esplanade to Alipore and Kalighat; the 29 continuing south to Tollygunge, the 24 usefully cutting across town to Gariahat market. Route 22 heads north up Rabindra Sarani. Route 14 heads east from BBD Bagh along Bipin Behan Ganguly St.