

Dhaka

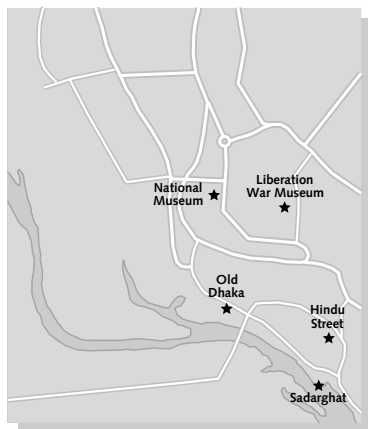


Dhaka is more than just a city, it is a giant whirlpool that sucks in anything and anyone foolish enough to come within its furious grasp. Around and around it sends them, like some wildly spinning fairground ride bursting with energy. Millions of individual pursuits constantly churn together into a frenzy of collective activity – it is an urban melting pot bubbling over. Nothing seems to stand still. Even the art moves, paraded on the back of the city's sea of 600,000-plus rickshaws, which throb with colour and restlessness even when gridlocked.

It doesn't matter how many times you experience this city, the sensation of being utterly overwhelmed is always the same. Sights and experiences come at you so thick and fast that it would take a lifetime to know this mega-city's every mood. A day spent alternating between the filthy riverbanks of Old Dhaka and the swish restaurants of Gulshan is a day spent seeing the haves and have-nots of the world in crystal clarity. We can't guarantee you'll fall for Dhaka's many charms, but sooner or later you will start to move to its beat and when that happens Dhaka stops being a terrifying ride and starts becoming a cauldron of art and intellect, passion and poverty, love and hate. Whatever happens, this is one fairground ride you'll never forget.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Staring dumbstruck at the panorama of life and death unfolding in front of you on a boat ride from **Sadarghat (p50)**
- Shielding your eyes from the horrors of war at the heart-stirring **Liberation War Museum (p55)**
- Getting noisy and colourful on Old Dhaka's **Hindu Street (p52)**
- Exploring the echoing halls of the treasure-filled **National Museum (p55)**, a multi-storey insight into the cultural heritage of Bangladesh
- Being completely engulfed by the chaos that is **Old Dhaka (p50)** – and loving every minute of it!
- Being trapped in an hour-long traffic jam consisting entirely of **rickshaws (p54)**



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 02

■ POPULATION: 12.5 MILLION

HISTORY

Founded in the 4th century, Dhaka first received principal status in 1610, when the Mughals transferred the capital from Rajmahal to Dhaka, and renamed it Jahangirnagar. During the Mughal period, Dhaka became the chief commercial emporium. This encouraged a much greater concentration of commerce: maritime trade brought industry, Islamic education and increasing sophistication in the arts. Dhaka's prosperity was also considerably enhanced – the Mughals built mosques, palaces, caravanserais (accommodation for camel caravans), bazaars and gardens. This development began to attract European traders from southern India.

In 1666 the British East India Company established a trading post in Dhaka; however, Dhaka's decline as a maritime trade centre had already begun. Dhaka remained the capital under the Mughals until 1704, when they moved it to Murshidabad.

The British East India Company extended its power to such an extent that by 1757 it controlled all of Bengal except Dhaka, which it took eight years later. It was under the British, during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, that the dominant forms of current economic development were established: indigo, sugar, tobacco, tea and, of course, jute.

In 1887 Dhaka became a district capital of Bangladesh, and in 1905 Bengal was divided into east and west, the eastern section incorporating Assam (with Dhaka as its winter capital). From this point on Dhaka again began to assume some measure of importance as an administrative centre. Government buildings, churches, residential enclaves and educational institutions transformed it into a city of great prosperity. During the existence of East Pakistan, Dhaka was classed as a subsidiary capital, and it was not until Independence in 1971 that Dhaka once again achieved its former capital-city status.

ORIENTATION

Dhaka is not too difficult to figure out, though you'll probably have a different opinion when you're standing in the street.

The city can be divided into three areas. Old Dhaka is a maze of crowded bazaars and equally crowded narrow streets lying between the northern bank of the Buriganga River and Fulbaria Rd. It's brimming with

points of interest for tourists, but not many facilities. The much larger 'modern' city begins about 2km to the north. The heart of Central Dhaka is Motijheel (moh-tee-jel), which is also an important commercial district. Major landmarks here include the National Stadium, the Shapla (Lotus Flower Fountain) Circle on Inner Circular Rd and the Raj-era Supreme Court, just north of Dhaka University. Beyond are the suburbs, including the cantonment and the upmarket quarters of Banani, Gulshan and Baridhara. These three quarters have the best restaurants, guesthouses, almost all of the embassies and many of the swishest shops.

Most major arteries run north-south. Starting in the east these include DIT Rd/Shaheed Suhrawardi Ave, Airport Rd, Kazi Nazrul Islam Ave, the shorter Begum Rokeya Sarani, and Mirpur Rd. The airport is on Airport Rd between Uttara to its north and the rest of the city to its south.

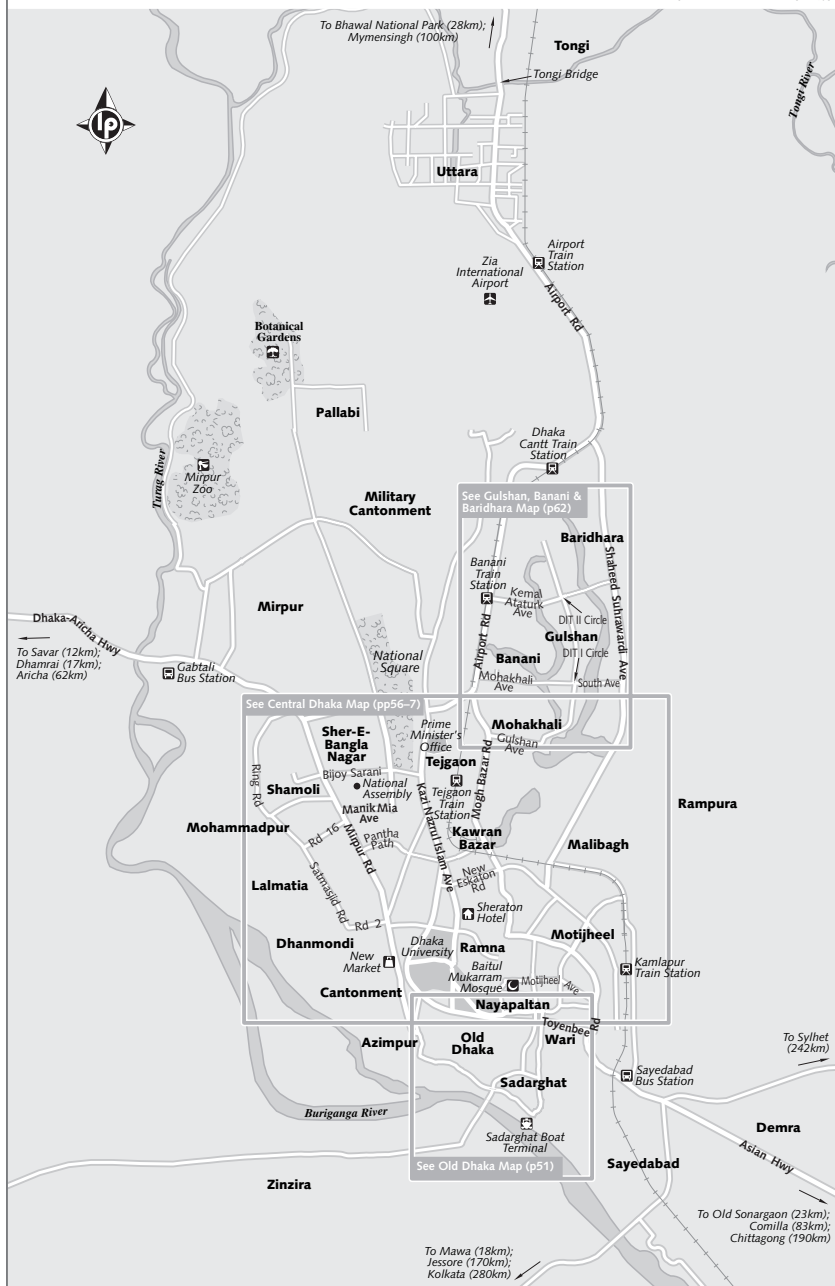
An important road connecting Old Dhaka and the central area is North-South Rd, heading south from Kakrail Rd past the main post office and the Gulistan (Fulbaria) bus station into Old Dhaka, and leading almost all the way to the Buriganga River. The intersection of North-South and Fulbaria Rds is known as Gulistan Crossing.

Travelling around Dhaka is complicated by the fact that the main roads are known by the names of the areas through which they pass, and rarely by their official name. Adding to the confusion is that side streets and lanes often take the same name as the nearby main road. If the driver of your rickshaw, bus or baby taxi (auto-rickshaw) doesn't speak English, you'll be better off giving sections of the city or landmarks, and addresses only after you get there.

Between 5pm and 8pm the traffic jams are phenomenal and walking is almost always quicker. Around Dhanmondi, which sees about the worst of the jams, the traffic is a mixed bag of buses, cars and rickshaws whereas in Old Dhaka, where motorised vehicles are banned, the traffic jams consist entirely of hundreds upon hundreds of rickshaws. Friday morning is the best time for wandering around – although few commercial businesses are open, a number of public markets and tourist sites can be visited. Some shops reopen in the afternoon, when traffic on the streets picks up.

GREATER DHAKA

0 2 km
0 1.0 miles



DHAKA IN TWO DAYS

After a long journey, you'll probably want to take the first day in Dhaka a bit easy so start off by heading to the **National Museum** (p55). Afterwards travel serenely in a rickshaw to Dhanmondi's **Mirpur Rd** (p64) for lunch. In the afternoon, spend some time wandering around nearby **Suhrawardi Park** (p55), and **Dhaka University** (p55). Next, mooch on over to the **Liberation War Museum** (p55) for a lesson on the painful birth of a nation. At night head to DIT II Circle in Gulshan and choose one of the many fine **restaurants** (p64) as the setting for the post-mortem of your day.

An exploration of **Old Dhaka** (p50) is the only way to spend your second day in the city. Start with a leisurely wander through history at **Lalbagh Fort** (p53) and the next door **Khan Mohammed Mirdha's Mosque** (p54). From here walk in any direction and you will find fantastic sights and unexpected adventures at every turn. Pace yourself with a few cha (tea) breaks and delicious street snacks. Don't miss out on **Shankharia Bazar (Hindu St)** (p52) and Nazira Bazar, the birthplace of **rickshaw art** (p66). After lunch in one of the old town's atmospheric eateries, blast on over to the fabulous **Ahsan Manzil** (Pink Palace; p52) and then, shortly before sunset, board a small boat at the chaotic **Sadarghat boat terminal** (p50) and drift out on the Buriganga River for a view of life at its grittiest – it is undoubtedly the highlight of a visit to Dhaka.

Wind down with an indulgent dinner in **Gulshan** (p64).

Maps

The best map of Dhaka is produced annually by **Mappa** (Map pp56-7; 112 Green Rd, Farmgate); you will be able to find it at most bookshops and occasionally at markets. The **Parjatan Corporation** (Map pp56-7; 233 Airport Rd) also has a map of Dhaka, available from its office and other tourist offices, as well as many bigger hotels. It has enough detail to enhance your sightseeing experience.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

There is a great literary culture in this city. The five-star hotels have bookshops that carry international newspapers, maps and a few interesting books on Bangladesh. There is a host of small but well-stocked bookshops on Mirpur Rd in Dhanmondi.

Other recommended bookshops:

Books Express (Map p62; Gulshan Ave, Gulshan)

Specialises in English-language titles. Also sells CDs and has a good selection of Lonely Planet guides. The cakes in the upstairs coffee shop are epic.

Narigrantha Prabartana (☎ 811 465; 5/3 Ring Rd, Shaymoli) A feminist bookshop and restaurant. For a nice change, men must be accompanied by women.

New Market complex (Map pp56-7; Azimpur Rd, Azimpur) The bibliophile's fantasy. When entering through the main entrance, turn left and walk as far as you can: you will be surrounded by great bookshops.

Words 'n' Pages (Map p62; ☎ 989 0832; Gulshan Ave, Gulshan; 🕒 10am-9.30pm) This new bookshop is open

every day and stocks a large range of Lonely Planet books and numerous English language novels as well as a large section devoted to South Asian studies. There's a small upstairs café.

Emergency

Fire (☎ 199)

Gulshan police station (☎ 988 0234)

Holy Family hospital (Map pp56-7; ☎ 831 1721/5)

International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease

Research in Bangladesh Hospital (ICDDR; Map

p62; ☎ 881 1751; 68 Shahid Tajuddein Ahmed Sharani, Mohakhali)

Police (☎ 999)

Internet Access

There are numerous small business centres (Map p51) offering fax, telephone, photocopying and internet access. The connections are normally good though most only have one or two computers.

Adda (Map p62; 3rd fl, Banani Super Market, Kemal Ataturk Ave, Banani; per hr Tk 40) Serves coffee.

Big-B (Map p62; 2nd fl, Banani Super Market, Kemal Ataturk Ave, Banani; per hr Tk 50)

Dynasty IT Cyber Café (Map pp56-7; Dewan Complex, cnr Elephant & New Elephant Rds; per hr Tk 50)

D-Zone Cyber Café (Map p62; Gulshan DIT II; per hr Tk 50) One of several small cyber cafés on Gulshan II circle.

Golden Cyber Café (Map p62; Gulshan DIT II; per hr Tk 50) Also on Gulshan II circle.

Speednet (Map p62; 1st fl, Banani Super Market, Kemal Ataturk Ave, Banani; per hr Tk 40)

Medical Services

International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease

Research in Bangladesh Hospital (ICDDR; Map p62; ☎ 881 1751; 68 Shahid Tajuddin Ahmed Sharani, Mohakhali) Has a traveller's clinic.

Japanese-Bangladesh Friendship Hospital (Map p62; ☎ 818 7575; House 27, Rd 114, Gulshan)

Money

Citibank (Map pp56-7; ☎ 955 0060; 122-4 Motijheel) North of Dilkusha II Circle.

Eastern Bank (Map pp56-7; ☎ 955 6360; Dilkusha II Circle, Motijheel)

HSBC (☎ 01199 884722) Gulshan (Map p62; cnr Gulshan Ave & Rd 5; Motijheel (Map pp56-7; 1/C DIT Ave) Both have ATM.

Janata Bank (Map pp56-7; ☎ 956 0000; Dilkusha I Circle, Motijheel)

Pubali Bank (Map pp56-7; ☎ 955 1071; 26 Dilkusha Rd, Motijheel)

Sonali Bank (Map pp56-7; ☎ 955 0426/34; Shapla Circle, Motijheel)

Standard Chartered Bank Banani (Map p62; ☎ 882 1718; 14 Kemal Ataturk Ave); Motijheel (Map pp56-7; ☎ 956 1465; Inner Circular Rd) Both branches have ATM.

Post

Main Post Office (Map pp56-7; ☎ 955 5533; cnr Abdul Ghani & North-South Rds; ☎ Sun-Thu) Near Baitul Mukarram Mosque. Parcel-wallahs (who sew up large parcels) can be found in a small shelter on the left of the building.

Tourist Information

Parjatan (Map pp56-7; ☎ 811 7855/9; 233 Airport Rd) National tourism organisation. Tourist brochures, car rentals and a couple of local tour options.

Travel Agencies

Hac Enterprise (Map pp56-7; ☎ 955 6211; 5 Inner Circular Rd, Motijheel)

Regency Travels (Map p62; ☎ 882 4760; 18 Kemal Ataturk Ave, Banani)

Unique Tours & Travel (Map p62; ☎ 988 5116/23; 51/B Kemal Ataturk Ave, Banani)

Vantage Tours & Travel (Map pp56-7; ☎ 811 7134-9; Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, Kazi Nazrul Islam Ave, Mogh Bazar)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Considering its massive size and high levels of poverty, Dhaka is a remarkably safe city and few travellers experience any problems. The biggest annoyance in Dhaka is air pollution, which though vastly improved since the banning of petrol and diesel vehicles a couple of

years ago (see p38) is still able to conjure up sore throats and headaches.

Bag-snatchings and muggings are rare but not unheard of. One trick is for a baby-taxi driver to snatch the belongings of an unsuspecting rickshaw passenger, often through prior arrangement with the rickshaw-wallah. As in the rest of the world, pickpockets operate in crowds, of which there are plenty in Dhaka. Be a little cautious, especially in markets.

Take particular care when withdrawing money from an ATM; it's a good idea to use ATMs with private booths so you can hide your money before you hit the streets.

Train and bus stations can be dodgy after dark, so try to avoid leaving or arriving at night.

Hartals (strikes) and accompanying violent demonstrations are common. During hartals it is safe enough to drive around the Gulshan area, and it is usually possible to move around the central city area by rickshaw; rickshaw-wallahs usually know which areas to avoid. Don't let your photojournalistic fantasies get the better of you – be curious from a safe distance.

See also p160 for more about scams.

SIGHTS Old Dhaka

No matter where in the world you've just come from, Old Dhaka, the chalk next to rural Bangladesh's quiet cheese, will side-swipe you with its overwhelming intensity, and leave impressions that will never fade. Time spent getting lost in its streets is time spent falling in love with this city.

SADARGHAT

Running calmly through the centre of Old Dhaka, the Buriganga River is the muddy artery of Dhaka and the very life blood of both this city and nation. To explore it from the deck of a small boat is to see Bangladesh at its most raw and gritty. The panorama of river life is fascinating. Triple-towered ferries leer over thousands of bustling ant-like canoes. Country boats bump off the dirty hulks of domineering cargo and fishing boats. On the grease-and-mud stained foreshores, you'll find children fishing with homemade nets in the lee of rusting tankers. Further out, repair men busy themselves crashing, bashing and scrubbing ship hulls while floating on planks of wood. Barges overloaded with sand

OLD DHAKA

INFORMATION

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Business Centre.....	2	C1

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

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Baldha Gardens.....	5	D2
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Gulistan (Fulbaria) Bus Station (Local Buses).....	25	C1
Sadarghat Boat Terminal.....	26	C3

and other building materials float down river with barely an inch of clearance above water. Extended families step fresh-faced and nervous off creaky craft that have brought them to a new life full of hollow promises.

Among all the large ships are the tiny wooden ones that you can hire. These are available almost everywhere along the waterfront, though most people hire them from around **Sadarghat boat terminal** (Map p51; Ahsanullah Rd; admission Tk 4). An increasing number of foreigners in Dhaka are starting to hire boats out, so things are becoming more organised and most boatmen will know what you want to do (a lack of a common language isn't much of a hindrance). It does however mean that prices are starting to rise and touts are beginning

to come to life. The standard rate is Tk 100 per hour but many boatmen will push for a higher price.

When out on the river, ask your boatman to take you to the far bank where you can disembark for few minutes and mingle with those whose lives revolve around the dirty riverbank. Keep an eye out for some of the *baras* (ancient houseboats) moored along the river bank. These worn-out boats, some half-a-century old, are popular floating restaurants catering to the poorest of the poor, where meals are served from 8am until midnight.

Do bear in mind that these river trips are not entirely safe – the multi-hulled ferries won't think twice about ploughing over the top of your puny little craft and the foreshore

NAWAB ABDUL GHANI

Nawab Abdul Ghani, born in 1830 of Kashmiri descent, was the most influential person in East Bengal in the last half of the 19th century. Unlike most zamindars, Ghani was Muslim. He, his son, Nawab Ahsanullah, and his grandson, Salimullah Bahadur, contributed greatly to Dhaka's development. Along with elephants, horses, boats and other materials donated to the British government, they also contributed large sums to local colleges. As Ghani's land-holdings grew to include most of Dhaka, he ruled like a king.

Politically astute, Ghani participated in both Hindu and Muslim festivals, and both groups admired him. He also introduced professional horse racing to Dhaka. When he returned from a voyage to Calcutta by steamer, flags were flown along the river, a band played lively tunes and guns were fired.

The demise of the family occurred when Ahsanullah, for whom Ahsan Manzil (Pink Palace) was named, died suddenly in 1901 without a will. Under Islamic law the monolithic estate was broken into nine parts and Ahsanullah's son, Salimullah, received only one part. Although residing at the Pink Palace, Salimullah was reduced to being a relatively poor man. Nevertheless, he contributed more to Muslim schools than anyone in the city's history, and founded Dhaka Medical School. Because of this he is revered today perhaps even more than his illustrious grandfather.

is little more than a filthy building site without the slightest nod to health and safety concerns! Don't let this put you off though because this river, with its powerful theatre of life and death, is probably the very reason you came to Bangladesh.

AHSAN MANZIL

About 600m west of Sadarghat is the must-see **Ahsan Manzil** (Pink Palace; Map p51; Ahsanullah Rd; admission Tk 2; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Sat-Wed, 3-7.30pm Fri Apr-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat-Wed, 3-7.30pm Fri Oct-Mar), one of the most interesting buildings in Dhaka.

Dating from 1872, Ahsan Manzil was built on the site of an old French factory by Nawab Abdul Ghani (see above), the city's wealthiest zamindar (landowner). Some 16 years after the palace's construction, it was damaged by a tornado. It was altered during restoration, becoming even grander than before. Lord Curzon stayed here whenever he came to visit. After the death of the nawab and his son, the family fortune was dispersed and the palace eventually fell into disrepair. It was saved from oblivion by massive restoration in the late 1980s, aided by photos of each of the 23 rooms, taken during the high point of the palace's history. The photos are still on display as are various family portraits and the skull of Nawab Abdul Ghanis's favourite elephant, Feroz Jung.

SHANKHARIA BAZAR (HINDU ST)

A crash of drums, a cloud of incense and a bursting paintbox of colours signal a welcome

to **Shankharia Bazar** (Map p51), also known as **Hindu St**. Lined on either side with ancient houses, garlands of lurid orange marigolds, and dark doorways leading to matchbox-sized shops and workshops, this is by far the most photogenic street in Old Dhaka. While exploring the bazaar keep one eye on the upper levels, where many of the houses have beautiful carvings. The *shankharis* (Hindu artisans) busy themselves creating kites, gravestones, wedding-hats, jewellery, and bangles carved out of conch shells.

Shankharis first came here over 300 years ago, but these days their art is slowly dying out. If you pass a shop and hear some faint grinding sounds out the back, ask to see the tiny quarters where they make the jewellery; most owners will be delighted to show you around. At the western end of the street you'll find a standpipe around which sariclad women can normally be found collecting water for the household. If your stay in Dhaka coincides with a Hindu festival then you're in for a treat. At any excuse, the inhabitants of this road build oversized clay-and-papier-mâché figures depicting Hindu gods and goddesses (Kali is a favourite) and parade up and down the old city, as noisy and boisterous as they can be. However, even if a festival isn't taking place there is always plenty going on.

To find Hindu St, head north along Nawabpur Rd from Sadarghat. After two long blocks you'll pass a small square on your right called Bahadur Shah Park, which has a cenotaph to commemorate the Indian Uprising

of 1857. From the northwestern corner, cross the street and head west, parallel to the river. After 100m you'll come to some small shops selling tombstones – that's the beginning. It continues for about 400m until it merges with Islampur Rd.

ARMENIAN CHURCH

About 1km northwest of Sadarghat, and north of Badam Tole, is an area called Armanitola, named after the Armenian colony that settled here in the late 17th century.

The peach-pink **Armenian Church of the Holy Resurrection** (Map p51; Armanitola Rd), is the soul of this now almost extinct community. The church, which dates from 1781, is an oasis of tranquillity in the heart of the crowded city. During the course of the Liberation War, the silver setting and organ were stolen and many of the graves were desecrated. **Mr Martin** (☎ 731 6953), the caretaker, has done much to restore the church, and delights in giving personal tours. Note that you can't get in without him unlocking the door for you.

The Armenian archbishop from Australia comes here about twice a year to hold services.

The church is open so long as Mr Martin is around – and even if he isn't someone in the neighbourhood will almost certainly go and summon him. From Badam Tole head north for two blocks to Islampur Rd, then left for one block and right for another.

SITARA MOSQUE

About 350m north of the Armenian church, you'll come to **Sitara Mosque** (Star Mosque; Map p51; Armanitola Rd), one of the city's most popular tourist attractions. Its striking mosaic decoration makes it look like your granny's best teacups. The mosque dates from the early 18th century, but has been radically altered. It was originally built in the typical Mughal style, with four corner towers. Around 50 years ago a local businessman financed its redecoration with Japanese and English china-tiles, and the addition of a new veranda. If you look hard you can see tiles illustrated with pictures of Mt Fuji. Non-Muslims are normally welcome outside of prayer time, but you should dress appropriately and women should bring something with which to cover their hair. Sitara Mosque is pictured on the Tk 100 note.

BARA KATRA & CHOTA KATRA

These dilapidated Mughal-era structures are about the oldest buildings in Dhaka. **Bara Katra** (Map p51), once a palace of monumental dimensions, was built in 1644 and now has a street running through its arched entrance. While only a small portion of the original structure remains standing, the building is still occupied and has a small prayer room on top.

Chota Katra (Map p51), which dates from 1663, was a caravanserai for visiting merchants. It was similar in design to Bara Katra, but there's not much left.

To find Bara Katra head west along Water Works Rd (the continuation of Islampur Rd) to the landmark Chowk Bazar Shahid Mosque, which has a very tall red-brick tower – you can't miss it. Bara Katra is located 100m south of the mosque, towards the river. Finding Chota Katra is a little more difficult. From Bara Katra head south and take the first left. Follow this road for a few hundred metres and Chota Katra is along a street to your left.

LALBAGH FORT

Along with Sadarghat, **Lalbagh Fort** (Map p51; admission Tk 10; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2.30-5.30pm Fri Nov-Mar, 10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 3-6pm Fri Apr-Oct, closed holidays) is one of the big hitters of Old Dhaka. Unlike the waterfront, which is full of raw energy, the fort is a slightly melancholy step back in the misty Mughal past of emperors and princesses. It's particularly atmospheric in the early morning light.

Construction of the fort began in 1677 under the auspices of Prince Mohammed Azam, third son of Aurangzeb, who handed it to Shaista Khan for completion. The death of Khan's daughter, Pari Bibi (Fair Lady), was considered such a bad omen that the fort was never completed. However, three architectural monuments within the complex – Diwan (Hall of Audience), Mausoleum of Pari Bibi and Quilla Mosque – were finished in 1684.

On the eastern side of the fort, to your far left as you enter, is the residence of the governor containing the Hall of Audience. It's an elegant two-storey structure. Inside there's a small museum of Mughal paintings and calligraphy, along with swords and firearms. Beyond the Hall of Audience, on the western side, a massive arched doorway leads to the central square *hammam* (bath house).

The middle building, the Mausoleum of Pari Bibi, is the only Bangladeshi building in which black basalt and white marble (from Bangladesh), and encaustic tiles of various colours have been used to decorate an interior. The inside central chamber, where Pari Bibi is buried, is entirely veneered in white marble.

You'll find Lalbagh Fort near the intersection of Dhakeswari and Azimpur Rds.

KHAN MOHAMMED MIRDHA'S MOSQUE

Some 500m west of Lalbagh Fort is **Khan Mohammed Mirdha's Mosque** (off Map p51; Lalbagh Rd). Erected in 1706, this Mughal structure is stylistically similar to Lalbagh Fort. It is built on a raised platform, up a flight of 25 steps. Three squat domes, with pointed minarets at each corner, dominate the rectangular roof. To get a good view of this walled mosque, enter the main gate off the main road. Unfortunately, unless you're here during prayer times (around 1pm), you'll probably find the gate locked.

DHAKESWARI TEMPLE

About 1km north of Lalbagh Fort, up a short alley off Dhakeswari Rd, is the city's main Hindu temple, **Dhakeswari Temple** (Map p51), dating from the 12th century. There are two sets of buildings. The one often seen in tourist photos consists of four adjoining *rekha* temples (buildings with a square sanctum on a raised platform with mouldings on the walls) covered by tall pyramidal roofs of the typical curvilinear *bangla* (bamboo-thatched hut with curved roof) style. It's nothing special, but it is colourful and you are likely to find some long-haired sadhus (itinerant holy men) hanging around smoking ganja.

HUSSAINI DALAN

A block north of the central jail is **Hussaini Dalan** (historic building; Map p51; Hussaini Dalan Rd, Bakshi Bazar) that looks more like a Hindu rajbari (landowner's palace) than an Islamic building. It was built in the 18th century, near the end of the Mughal period, as the house of the imam of the Shi'ia community. The Ashura festival (see p162), on the 10th day of the Islamic month of Muharram, is celebrated here.

Though the architecture seems baroque in inspiration, the original building was purely Mughal. It changed somewhat with restorations after the 1897 earthquake, when the roof collapsed. You can see a silver fili-

COUNTING RICKSHAWS

The Dhaka police estimate there are about 600,000 rickshaws in the city. However, the revenue department of Dhaka City Corporation, the body responsible for collecting licence fees from rickshaw-wallahs, has a different figure. When a newspaper reporter asked a top official from the department about the number of rickshaws in Dhaka, the official replied, 'There are 88,700-and-something rickshaws in the city'. When the reporter pointed out that other estimates were somewhat higher, the official replied, 'As far as we are concerned there are only 88,700-and-something rickshaws in the city. If you disbelieve me, why don't you start counting?'

gree model of the original building in the National Museum (opposite).

BALDHA GARDENS & CHRISTIAN CEMETERY

At the eastern end of Tipu Sultan Rd, and a block south of Hatkhola Rd, the **Baldha Gardens** (Map p51; admission Tk 5; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Thu, closed at lunch) in Wari provide a nice break from the rest of the sightseeing you'll be doing in the area. The two walled enclosures, Cybele and Psyche, were once the private gardens of Narendra Narayan Roy, a wealthy zamindar, whose grandson gave them to the government in 1962 as a tribute to his family.

Just opposite is the **Christian Cemetery** (Map p51), which, as well as all the expected British names, contains a large number of Portuguese graves.

BANGSAL RD (BICYCLE ST)

For a souvenir of Bangladesh, you can't beat a piece of rickshaw art. The place to find this art is in Nazira Bazar on **Bangsall Rd**, popularly known as **Bicycle St**.

The street begins 700m south of Gulistan bus station, heading west from North-South Rd, a block south of the well-marked Hotel Al-Razzaque International.

See p66 for more on rickshaw art.

Central Dhaka

North of Old Dhaka is the old European zone, now the modern part of town.

BAITUL MUKARRAM MOSQUE

West of Motijheel on Topkhana Rd, the modern **Baitul Mukarram Mosque** (Map pp56–7) is designed in the style of the holy Ka'aba of Mecca. Non-Muslims can normally enter outside of prayer time. The boisterous market in the surrounding streets is interesting.

DHARMARAJIKHA BUDDHIST MONASTERY

The largest Buddhist cultural centre in the country is the **Dharmarajikha Buddhist Monastery** (Map pp56–7), located east of Sayedabad Rd. It has an enormous bronze statue and a marble statue of Buddha. There's a peaceful pond here too – bring a book and get some reading done. The monastery is open during daylight hours (vague, but true). Take off your shoes before entering the temple and don't take photos of any shrines without permission.

OLD HIGH COURT & AROUND

The imposing **Old High Court** (Map pp56–7), once the governor's residence, is just north of Dhaka University's main campus. It is the finest example in Dhaka of the European Renaissance style. Nearby is the newer **Mausoleum for Three Martyrs** (Map pp56–7) and the **Mosque of Hazrat Haji Khawja Shahbaz** (Map pp56–7), a popular shrine dedicated to a rich merchant who devoted much of his energy and money to helping the poor of Dhaka. A little to the east of this is the **Supreme Court** (Map pp56–7).

SUHWARAWDI & RAMNA PARKS

Beginning near the Old High Court and stretching all the way to the National Museum, **Suhrawardi Park** (Map pp56–7; ☎ 6am–10pm) covers an enormous area. This was once a racecourse, where both the Bangladeshi Declaration of Independence and the surrender of Pakistani occupation forces took place in 1971. At night the park turns into an open-air market and also attracts hundreds of homeless who, living by the 'safety in numbers' motto, set up camp each evening on the pavements outside. A few unsavoury characters mean you should keep your wits about you at night around here.

Northeast of Suhrawardi Park is **Ramna Park**, which is well tended and has a boating lake.

DHAKA UNIVERSITY & CURZON HALL

Dating from 1921, **Dhaka University** (DU; Map pp56–7) has some fine old buildings. North of the Engineering University campus is the

British Council Library (Map pp56–7) and further north, on Kazi Nazrul Islam Ave, is the **Institute of Arts & Crafts** (Map pp56–7), which has an art gallery.

On the main campus, south of the Old High Court, **Curzon Hall** (Map pp56–7) is the university's architectural masterpiece and science faculty. It's a fine example of the European-Mughal style of building erected after the first partition of Bengal in 1905. The red-brick building has eye-catching detail, and an elegant façade.

Two blocks west, on Secretariat Rd and just north of the College of Medicine, is the **Central Shaheed Minar** (Map pp56–7), built to commemorate the historic Language Movement of 1952.

NATIONAL MUSEUM

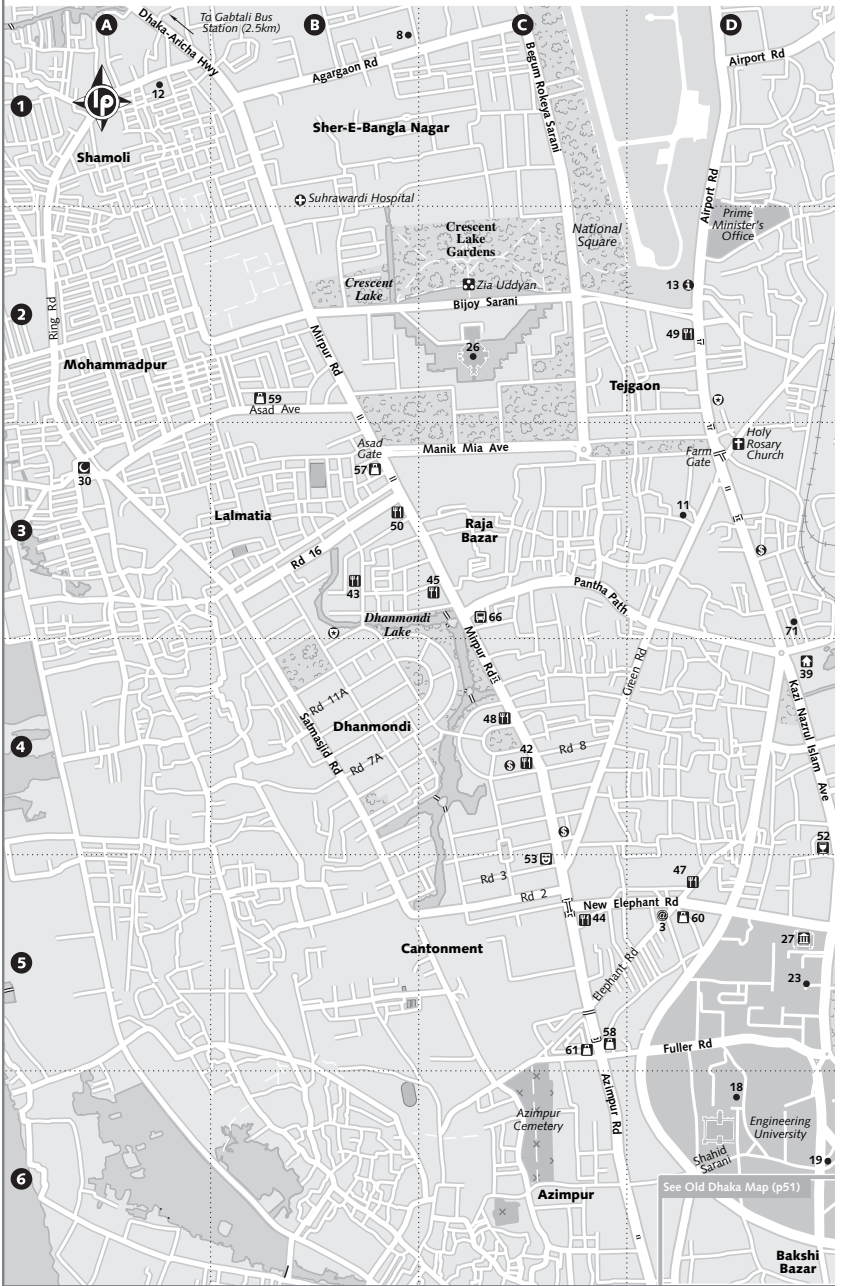
A visit to the **National Museum** (Map pp56–7; Kazi Nazrul Islam Ave; admission Tk 5; ☎ 9.30am–4pm Sat–Wed, 3–7pm Fri) is a good way of downloading information about Bangladesh. Sprawling over several floors it begins at the beginning with the geological formation of Bangladesh, whisks you through a rundown of the nation's flora and fauna, saunters through a Buddhist and Hindu past, and brings you bang up to date with the War of Liberation and the creation of the modern state. Some of the exhibits are a little stale – the stuffed birds are looking more stuffed and less bird with every passing year, and it's amazing how badly lit, displayed and labelled everything is.

It's a good idea to avoid visiting on Friday when most of Dhaka will be here and you'll be as much of an attraction as the ancient relics.

LIBERATION WAR MUSEUM

This **museum** (Map pp56–7; ☎ 955 9091; 5 Segun Bagicha Rd; admission Tk 3; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat), chronicling one of the 20th century's more deadly wars, is spread out over two floors and has been put together with enormous pride and respect. The display on the 1971 War of Independence is arranged chronologically, with English and Bengali newspaper reports, photographs and various memorabilia. The displays start off tame enough but gradually become more graphic before culminating in a room full of personal items (each of which comes with a short story on the owner's life); a large pile of human skulls and bones; and some very disturbing photos of rotting corpses with bound hands being eaten by dogs and

CENTRAL DHAKA



INFORMATION		Old High Court.....	28 E6	ENTERTAINMENT 📺	
Citibank.....	1 G6	Ramna Park.....	29 E5	Alliance Francaise.....	53 C5
Dhaka Tours Rent-A-Car Association.....	2 E4	Sat Gumbad Mosque.....	30 A3	Osmani Auditorium.....	54 E6
Dynasty IT Cyber Café.....	3 D5	Suhrawardi Park.....	31 E5	Shilpakala Academy.....	55 E5
Eastern Bank.....	4 F6	Supreme Court.....	32 E6	Shishu Academy.....	56 E6
Hac Enterprise.....	5 G6	SLEEPING 🛏		SHOPPING 🛍	
Holy Family Hospital.....	6 E4	Asia Hotel.....	33 F6	Aarong Handicrafts.....	57 B3
HSBC Bank.....	7 F6	Hotel Cairo International.....	34 F6	Chandni Chowk Bazar.....	58 C5
Immigration & Passport Office.....	8 B1	Hotel Midway International.....	35 F5	Halima Handicrafts.....	59 B2
Janata Bank.....	9 G6	Hotel Orchard Plaza.....	36 F5	Kumudini.....	(see 39)
Main Post Office.....	10 F6	Hotel Pacific.....	37 F6	Mona Jewellers.....	(see 17)
Mappa.....	11 D3	Hotel Razmoni Isha Kha.....	38 F5	Monno Ceramics.....	60 D5
Narigantha Prabantana.....	12 A1	Hotel Royal Palace.....	(see 33)	New Market.....	61 C5
New Market Complex.....	(see 61)	Hotel Victory.....	(see 35)	Stadium Arcade.....	62 F6
Parjatan.....	13 D2	Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel.....	39 D4	TRANSPORT	
Parjatan Corporation.....	(see 13)	Sheraton Hotel.....	40 E5	Biman.....	63 G6
Pubali Bank.....	14 G6	White House Hotel.....	41 F5	BIWTC (Reservations for the Rocket).....	
Sonali Bank.....	15 G6	EATING 🍴		British Airways.....	64 G6
Standard Chartered Bank.....	16 G6	Bronx Café.....	42 C4	Bus Offices for Rajshahi & Khulna Divisions.....	65 G6
Vantage Tours & Travel.....	(see 39)	Café Mango.....	43 B3	Emirates.....	66 C3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Malancha Restaurant.....	44 C5	GMG Airlines.....	67 G6
Baitul Mukarram Mosque.....	17 F6	New Café Jheel.....	(see 34)	Gulf Air.....	68 C6
British Council Library.....	18 D6	Santoor.....	45 C3	Gulf Air.....	(see 71)
Central Shaheed Minar.....	19 D6	Sung Garden Restaurant.....	46 F5	Gulf Air.....	69 G6
Curzon Hall.....	20 E6	Xian.....	47 D5	Indian Airlines.....	(see 40)
Dhaka University.....	21 E6	Xinxian.....	48 C4	Kamlapur Bus Station.....	70 F6
Dharmarajikha Buddhist Monastery.....	22 H5	Yummy Yummy.....	49 D2	KLM.....	71 D3
Institute of Arts & Crafts.....	23 D5	Yummy Yummy.....	50 B3	Korean Air.....	(see 67)
Liberation War Museum.....	24 F5	DRINKING ☕ 🍷		National Bus Company.....	(see 66)
Mausoleum for Three Martyrs.....	25 E5	Mohamad Isobali Tea Shop.....	51 F5	Pakistan International Airways.....	(see 40)
Mosque of Hazrat Haji Khawja Shahbaz.....	(see 25)	Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel.....	(see 39)	Shohagh Paribahan Bus Lines.....	72 C5
National Assembly.....	26 C2	Peacock Restaurant.....	52 D4	Soudia Bus Lines.....	(see 72)
National Museum.....	27 D5	Sheraton Hotel.....	(see 40)	Thai International.....	(see 40)
		Sukura Restaurant.....	(see 52)		

vultures. Though the displays might not make for happy holidays, this museum should be a compulsory stop for everyone.

From Topkhana Rd head north up Segun Bagicha Rd; it's on the second street on the right. Contact the museum to find out about its cultural events.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

In 1963 the Pakistanis commissioned Louis Kahn, a world-renowned American architect, to design a regional capital for East Pakistan. Due to the liberation movement and ensuing war, the **National Assembly building** (Map pp56-7) wasn't completed until 1982. The building often features in books on modern architecture, and is regarded as among Kahn's finest works.

It's a huge assembly of concrete cylinders and rectangular boxes, sliced open with bold, multi-storey circular and triangular apertures instead of windows, and is probably only considered attractive by fans of grim '70s architecture.

It is not usually possible to approach the building too closely. On the opposite side of the road is a large and enjoyable park full of loving couples.

SAT GUMBAD MOSQUE

Dating from 1680, **Sat Gumbad Mosque** (Map pp56-7) is a white-washed onion dome mosque, and the finest example of the pure Mughal-style mosque in Dhaka.

Unfortunately, few travellers see Sat Gumbad because of its somewhat remote location. Head north from Dhanmondi on Mirpur Rd, turn left through Asad Gate and go to the end of the road (1.5km). Then begin asking; it's nearby, towards the river. Women are admitted if appropriately dressed.

Suburban Dhaka

BOTANICAL GARDENS

The shady, tranquil **botanical gardens** (Map p48; admission Tk 5; 🕒 9am-5pm), stretch over 40 hectares and contain over 1000 species of local and foreign plants. It's a nice respite from the

city's mass of humanity. In the distance you'll see the Turag River.

These gardens are probably the best place in the city for bird-watching. The quiet early mornings are especially good. Next door to the gardens is a zoo, but it isn't a pleasant place.

The gardens are on the northwestern outskirts of Dhaka. To get there take a bus from Gulistan bus station to Mirpur via Begum Rokeya Sarani, then take a rickshaw (Tk 15 to Tk 20).

ACTIVITIES

Language Courses

See Courses in the Directory chapter (p159) for information about learning Bengali.

Rickshaw Rides

One of the best ways to see the sights of Dhaka is by rickshaw. The going rate is about Tk 80 per hour. Rickshaw-wallahs who speak English can generally be found outside five-star hotels, but charge more and expect a tip. You can also approach a tour company to organise a sightseeing tour on a rickshaw.

River Trips

There are several companies offering trips on the rivers encircling Dhaka.

Contic (☎ 881 4851; mail@contic.com; House 183, Rd 69, Gulshan II), a river-cruise specialist with an elegant boat, the *Fleche D'Or*, cruises along the Turag River (west of the city) down to the Buriganga River. Contic cruises get excellent reviews.

Guide Tours (Map p62; ☎ 988 6983; www.guidetours.com; 1st fl, Darpan Complex, DIT II Circle, Gulshan; ☎ cruises Mon, Fri & Sat) offers a 4½ hour cruise along the Sitalakhya River on its yacht, the *SB Ruposhi*, departing from Demra (a river town about 15km east of Dhaka). You'll get to stop at a village of *jamdani* (muslin-cloth) weavers en route.

Swimming

Non-guests can use the pool at the Sheraton Hotel (Map pp56–7) for Tk 1200 per day.

TOURS

Guide Tours (Map p62; ☎ 988 6983; www.guidetours.com; 1st fl, Darpan Complex, DIT II Circle, Gulshan), the company with the best reputation, offers half- and full-day tours in and around Dhaka. Half-day tours cover Sadarghat, Lalbagh Fort, the Liberation War Museum and other sights,

and cost Tk 1500 per person. Full-day tours include Savar or Sonargaon and cost Tk 2300 per person (minimum four people). Guide Tours also runs day trips to a pottery village near Savar and overnight stays in a village.

Bengal Tours (Map p62; ☎ 883 4716; www.bengaltours.com; Block A, Banani) offers half- and full-day city tours. The half-day tours focus on Old Dhaka while the full-day tour spins you around both the commercial city and Old Dhaka. Prices are virtually identical to those of Guide Tours.

There are several other companies offering city tours and, at this stage in Bangladesh's foray into tourism, it's a good idea to give some of the smaller up-and-coming operators a go.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

One of the most exciting events to be part of in Dhaka is the colourful Hindu festival of **Durga Puja**, commemorating the victory of the mighty warrior goddess, Durga.

On the last evening of the five-day festival, devotees parade their clay-and-bamboo effigies through the streets toward Sadarghat. At nightfall the statues of Durga are immersed in the Buriganga River, ending the festivities. The festival is held at the Dhakeswari Temple (p54) around the second week of October.

Around the same time as Durga Puja, there's a colourful boat race on the Buriganga near Postagola. It's quite a spectacle and is inaugurated each year by the president of Bangladesh. Each longboat is crammed with about 60 oarsmen and the competition ensues amidst continuous clapping by the spectators. Advance publicity is poor. Contact **Parjatan** (Map pp56–7; ☎ 811 7855/9; 233 Airport Rd) for details.

An interesting experience in Dhaka is the **International Mother Language Day** (held on 21 February), commemorating the martyrs who fought in the 1952 Language Movement. Blood was shed (where the Central Shaheed Minar now stands) to establish Bengali as the national language. Mourners gather at the monument at midnight each year to pay their respects with songs, prayers and the laying of wreaths.

Bangladeshi New Year's Day falls in mid-April.

SLEEPING

Accommodation is more expensive in Dhaka than elsewhere in Bangladesh, but it's still cheap by international standards. Almost all

midrange and top-end hotels offer large, year-round discounts on stated rates (up to 50% off) and most of the time this will be volunteered before you've had a chance to ask. However if you're booking online or by phone, you're less likely to be offered a discount. Fortunately, it's rare that Dhaka hotels are full, so you can safely just turn up and find something to suit. The highest concentration of budget and midrange hotels is in the area extending from Inner Circular Rd down to Old Dhaka. There aren't any top-end hotels in Old Dhaka.

Old Dhaka

BUDGET

There are numerous hotels on Nawabpur Rd costing no more than a handful of Taka, but they almost universally refuse to accept foreign tourists.

Hotel Sugandha (Map p51; ☎ 955 6720; 243-4 Nawabpur Rd; s/d Tk 120/350) It's cheap and it's one of the very few that will let you stay, but hygiene isn't a strong point, and female guests aren't welcome. The double rooms are quite large and have balconies overlooking a grey wall.

Hotel Al-Razzaque International (Map p51; ☎ 956 6408; 29/1 North-South Rd; s/d with bathroom Tk 210/270) The al-Razzaque offers great value budget beds in rooms that are kept lovingly clean. For once the sheets aren't disturbingly stained and it has sit-down toilets. The signs asking guests and staff to not drop rubbish work; the signs saying 'no spitting' don't. Women will almost certainly not be allowed to stay.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Ramna (Map p51; ☎ 956 2279; 45 Bangabandhu Ave; s/d from Tk 350-630) Don't get too excited by the glass-fronted reception area; the rooms are much more down-to-earth. However, they are kept clean and what you get for the price is excellent. It can be a little difficult to find in the maze of tailor shops.

Hotel Grand Palace International (Map p51; ☎ 956 1623; 11-12 North-South Rd; s with/without air-con TK 500/250, d with/without air-con Tk 700-800; ☎) The small and tidy rooms would be a good bet but for the bedlam of noise echoing up from the road below, which is certain to make sleep an impossible dream.

Central Dhaka

BUDGET

Asia Hotel (Map pp56-7; ☎ 956 0709; 34/1 Topkhana Rd; s with shared bathroom Tk 180, d with/without TV Tk 450/350) One of the few hotels on Topkhana Rd that

accepts foreigners, the Asia Hotel is on a quiet side street and has spacious rooms that offer good value for your Taka. Bring a torch (flashlight) though, as the electricity supply isn't too hot.

Hotel Cairo International (Map pp56-7; ☎ 956 2594; 19 Topkhana Rd; s/d Tk 250/300) Small and shabby rooms, but this is one of the rare cheapies happy to have you to stay and, quite frankly, at this price you can't knock it. It has a more reliable electricity supply than the nearby Asia Hotel.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Midway International (Map pp56-7; ☎ 831 9315; hotelmid@aitlbd.net; 30 VIP Rd, Nayapaltan; s/d Tk 610-980, d with air-con Tk 1220; ☎) The rooms, which have big wooden wardrobes, dressing tables and tiled bathrooms, must once have been the star of the show, but today the first signs of tropical rot are setting in. The lacklustre staff doesn't exactly help either, but if everywhere else is full then this is good for a night or two.

Hotel Pacific (Map pp56-7; ☎ 955 8148; www.hotelpacificdhaka.com; 120/B Motijheel; d with/without air-con Tk 1200/800, deluxe d Tk 1600; ☎) The Hotel Pacific continues to rule the roost as the best value cheapie in Central Dhaka. There is a wide range of room types, and all are spacious and homely with hot water in the bathrooms. The staff are unfailingly polite and welcoming without being overpowering. They are quite used to foreigners and their strange ways.

Hotel Royal Palace (Map pp56-7; ☎ 716 8972; www.hrpalaceld.com; 31/D Topkhana Rd; s/d with air-con Tk 1300/1700; ☎) A palace fit for royalty it ain't, but for the rest of us the clean and tidy rooms ferreted away in this hotel offer everything likely to be required. There are numerous different classes of rooms – the prices given are for the standard air-con joints.

Hotel Razmoni Isha Kha (Map pp56-7; ☎ 832 2426; razmoni@bdcom.com; VIP Rd; s/d Tk 2000/2800) A vast auditorium-like reception leads onward to some of the better midrange rooms in this part of town. The highlights are the big puffy, bubble chairs and the massive views over the city. There is free breakfast and plenty of parking, but the staff could be more welcoming.

White House Hotel (Map pp56-7; ☎ 832 2973/6; fax 831 7726; 155 Shantinagar Rd; s/d with fan US\$14/17, deluxe s/d with air-con US\$25/30; ☎) This place has small but lovingly maintained rooms that are cleaner than most places of a similar price. Be

warned though that the management aren't keen on unmarried couples.

ourpick Hotel Victory (Map pp56-7; ☎ 935 3088; www.hotelvictorybd.com; VIP Rd; s/d US\$40/60; 📶 📺). Stated rates are little more than make-believe and as soon as you enter you'll be offered a 50% discount. Even if you were paying top dollar these rooms would be good value, but with the price you'll end up paying it's a certified bargain. The newly built Victory has small, comfortable, spick-and-span rooms that are as quiet as a library, and the staff have a professional attitude. The restaurant is guaranteed to keep you coming back for more. It's easily the best in the class and gives the top-end hotels a good run for their money.

TOP END

Hotel Orchard Plaza (Map pp56-7; ☎ 933 0829; fax 989 4573; www.hotelorchardplaza.com; 71 VIP Rd; r US\$70-80; 📶 📺) The cheapest of the big boys, the Orchard Plaza is all neon lights and equally flashy rooms – this business class hotel has large rooms kept very clean and staff who keep smiling. Rates include a free breakfast, internet access and an upstairs gym. The stated rates are a bit high, but like many Dhaka hotel there seems to be a no-questions-asked 30% discount.

At the time of writing we received reports that a major gas explosion had severely damaged this hotel. It is uncertain when, or if, it will reopen (and even if it does you may not want to commit to their wiring!).

Sheraton Hotel (Map pp56-7; ☎ 833 0001; www.sheraton.com/dhaka; 1 Minto Rd; r exd 27% tax from US\$130; 📶 📺) The facilities might be similar to the Pan Pacific and prices much the same (after the near-standard 50% discount at the Pan Pacific) but, with its '70s architecture and musty smelling rooms, the Sheraton is definitely the poorer cousin. The nice pool is open to non-guests for a whopping Tk 1200 per day.

Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel (Map pp56-7; ☎ 811 1005; www.panpacific.com; 107 Kazi Nazrul Islam Ave; d exd 30% tax from US\$250; 📶 📺) Leave the chaos of the outside world behind and step into the tranquillity of the Pan Pacific. It has everything you'd expect of a top-dog hotel – large and tasty rooms, numerous restaurants and relaxation facilities (though the pool was under refurbishment at the time of research), and a couple of nice little touches that add class (for example, sofas in the elevators and, from

some rooms, wonderful views of the slums below...). The price stated here is the standard rack rate, but discounts of 50% are normal.

Gulshan Area

The greater Gulshan area, including Banani and Baridhara, is the heart of the diplomatic zone and hence something of a foreigners ghetto. This can be a pro or a con, depending on what you're looking for, but it is hard to see the peace, quiet and cleanliness of this area as a negative. Prices are higher here than elsewhere in Dhaka.

MIDRANGE

The Royal Inn (Map p62; ☎ 882 5139; fax 882 3007; House 38, Rd 18, Banani; s/d Tk 1000/1200) The cheapest rooms in Dhaka's poshest corner have a nice white-washed and wicker feel to them. However, bring your own sheets as the ones it provides are coated in very suspect stains.

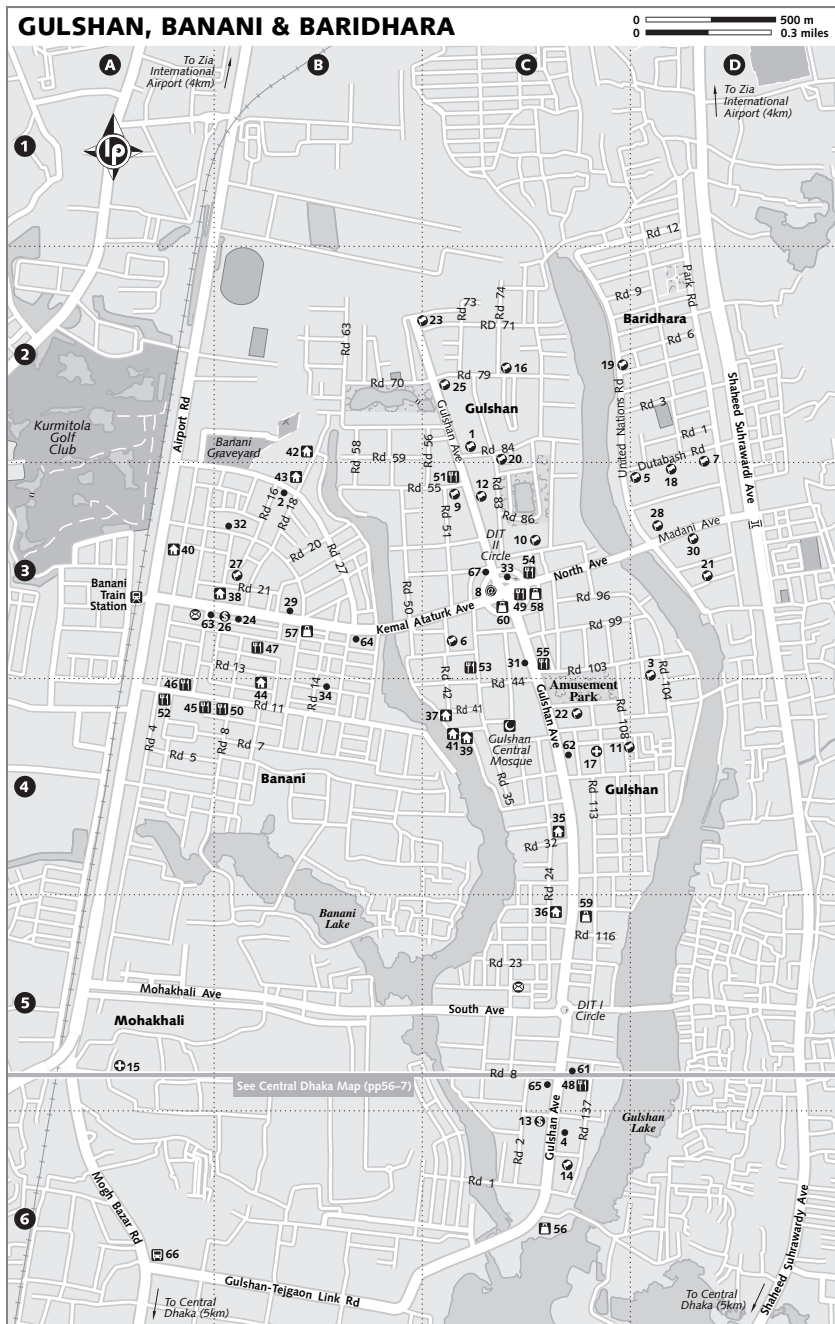
The Jame Prestige Abode (Map p62; ☎ 882 9474; jame@bijoy.net; House 97, Rd 4, Block B, Banani; economy/standard/deluxe r Tk 1300/1700/2300, ste Tk 3300 plus 15% tax) In a former incarnation, this charming guesthouse was known as the French Inn and was about as close as Dhaka got to a travellers centre. Today, the name might have changed but not the game. The welcome remains as warm as ever and the staff as knowledgeable. The single rooms can be a little stuffy but the pastel-blue doubles are perfect for the discerning traveller couple.

Sky Park Guesthouse (Map p62; ☎ 989 9894; sky_park_net@hotmail.com; House 65, Rd 15, Banani; r Tk 1500) Backpackers – when you want one you can't find one for love or money. That's the problem Sky Park is facing. It's as cheap and cheerful as this part of Dhaka gets and its rooms are all jazzed up for the party, but alas, there's not a backpacker in sight.

The Chalet (Map p62; ☎ 881 5689; fax 881 2709; House 5/A, Rd 32, Gulshan I; s/d US\$30-40; 📶 📺) Offering some of Gulshan's cheapest and best value rooms, the Chalet may lack some of the gloss of the more expensive hotels, but its immaculate rooms really do have everything you actually need. An almost instant 20% discount is offered on the above rates. There's free breakfast and internet, and the downstairs restaurant gets votes of approval.

Eastern House (Map p62; ☎ 988 2216; www.eghouse.dhaka.com; House 4, Rd 24, Gulshan I; s/d US\$50-55; 📶 📺) It might look like a private residence but it is in fact a hotel, and a pretty good one at that. The

GULSHAN, BANANI & BARIDHARA



INFORMATION		Regency Travels.....	24 B3	EATING 🍴	Club Gelato.....	45 A4	
Adda.....	(see 57)	Russian Embassy.....	25 C2	Cofi Il.....	(see 60)		
Australian High Commission.....	1 C2	Speednet.....	(see 57)	Dhaba.....	46 A4		
Bengal Tours.....	2 B3	Standard Chartered Bank.....	26 B3	Dominous Pizza.....	47 B3		
Bhutan Embassy.....	3 D3	Swedish Embassy.....	(see 9)	El Toro.....	48 C5		
Big-B.....	(see 57)	Swiss Embassy.....	27 B3	Gulshan Plaza Restaurant.....	49 C3		
Books Express.....	4 C6	Thai Embassy.....	28 D3	Helvetia.....	(see 24)		
British High Commission.....	5 D3	Unique Tours & Travel.....	29 B3	Kebab-E-Q.....	50 B4		
Canadian High Commission.....	6 C3	US Embassy.....	30 D3	Khazana.....	51 C3		
Chinese Embassy.....	7 D2	Words 'n' Pages.....	31 C3	King's Confectionary.....	52 A4		
D-Zone Cyber Café.....	8 C3	SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES			Samdado Restaurant.....	53 C3	
Danish Embassy.....	9 C3	Effective Bangla Learning Centre (EBLC).....	32 B3	Spaghetti Jazz.....	54 C3		
Dutch Embassy.....	10 C3	Guide Tours.....	33 C3	Spitfire's Barbeque & Grill.....	(see 51)		
French Embassy.....	11 C4	HEED.....	34 B4	Topkapi.....	55 C3		
German Embassy.....	12 C3	SLEEPING 🛏			SHOPPING 🛍		
Golden Cyber Café.....	(see 60)	Chalet.....	35 C4	Aarong Handicrafts.....	56 C6		
HSBC Bank.....	13 C6	Eastern House.....	36 C5	Banani Super Market.....	57 B3		
Indian High Commission.....	14 C6	Green Goose Guesthouse.....	37 C4	DIT II Market.....	58 C3		
International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research in Bangladesh Hospital.....	15 A5	Hotel De Castle.....	38 B3	Kumudini.....	59 C5		
Italian Embassy.....	16 C2	Hotel Golden Deer.....	39 C4	Monno Fabrics.....	60 C3		
Japan-Bangladesh Friendship Hospital.....	17 C4	Jame Prestige Abode.....	40 A3	TRANSPORT			
Japanese Embassy.....	18 D3	Lake Shore Hotel & Apartments.....	41 C4	British Airways.....	61 C5		
Malaysian Embassy.....	19 C2	Laurel Hotels.....	42 B2	Emirates Airlines.....	62 C4		
Myanmar Embassy.....	20 C2	Royal Inn.....	43 B3	GMG Airlines.....	63 A3		
Nepalese Embassy.....	21 D3	Sky Park Guesthouse.....	44 B4	Hertz.....	64 B3		
Norwegian Embassy.....	22 C4				Malaysian Airlines.....	65 C5	
Pakistani High Commission.....	23 C2				Mohakhali Bus Station.....	66 A6	
						Singapore Airlines.....	67 C3

comfortable front rooms have balconies and road noise, while in the back rooms you say goodbye to the balcony, but gain the peace. The horror-house dolls inhabiting some of the alcoves are certain to give you nightmares.

Green Goose Guesthouse (Map p62; ☎ 882 1928; gggoose@citech-bd.com; Rd 38, Gulshan; r US\$60; 🚻) Super-sized rooms with bizarre, but kind of cool, wood panelling over the walls. The little kitchenettes make this a good one for long-stay guests. Rates are, as normal, highly flexible. On a quiet side street and, just in case you're interested, the bird on their logo is a male mallard duck not a green goose...

Hotel De Castle (Map p62; ☎ 881 2888; www.hoteldecastle.com; House B/72, Rd 21, Banani; s/d US\$70/80; 🚻 📺) Reliably clean and inviting rooms with a quiet and cool atmosphere. The location is good, just a stone's throw from all the action but far enough away to avoid all that commotion. There's a standard 40% discount.

TOP END

Laurel Hotels (Map p62; ☎ 883 4009; www.laurelhotelbd.com; House 54, Rd 18, Block J, Banani; s/d US\$66/90; 🚻 📺) With 50% discount virtually compulsory, this hotel packs a real punch in the bargain department. It has the look of a business-class hotel, but without the formality. It's large, airy, and

sunshine-bright rooms are kept spotless, and prices include internet and breakfast. The only downside is that if you are of Bangladeshi/Indian descent (even if it's two generations removed and it's your first time on the sub-continent), you will not be allowed to stay for security reasons!

Hotel Golden Deer (Map p62; ☎ 882 6259; Rd 35/A, House 31/B, Gulshan II; s/d with breakfast US\$70/90) Not only is dirty old Dhaka home to the ever so rare Golden Goose but, hiding down a leafy lane, is the equally scarce Golden Deer. This creature offers large, shiny, white-tiled rooms – just make sure you get a front room in order to enjoy massive views over the cityscape and the lake out front. Discounts are standard and breakfast is included.

our pick Lake Shore Hotel & Apartments (Map p62; ☎ 885 9991; www.lakeshorehotel.com.bd; House 46, Rd 41; r/ste from US\$160/240; 🚻 📺) Everything about this hotel, from the modern glass bathroom fittings to the rooftop pool fit for a New York millionaire, is simply magnificent. If you fit in this price category then you fit in this hotel.

EATING

Old Dhaka

Decent Pastry Shop (Map p51; Nawabpur Rd) A slightly incongruous sight in the den of the old town

the Decent Pastry Shop is a towering pillar of calm, sanity, and Western cleanliness and tastes.

Al-Razzaque (Map pp51; ☎ 956 6408; 29/1 North-South Rd; meals Tk 80) When locals tell you that this restaurant (belonging to the Hotel Al-Razzaque International) is the king of old-town eateries, you'd better believe it. There are separate booths for women, and the attached cake shop and juice bar are equally good.

Hotel Nigar (Map p51; Nawabpur Rd; meals Tk 80) Step down that dimly lit alley/tunnel and cheap and reliable tastes await.

Central Dhaka

New Café Jheel (Map pp56-7; ☎ 955 2255; 18/1 Topkhana Rd; ☎ 6am-midnight; mains Tk 80) If you want to know what Bengali food is supposed to taste like then check out the thick, fiery curries at this bright and clean favourite. Tk 120 will get you a curry, rice and naan bread.

ourpick Café Mango (Map pp56-7; ☎ 913 6686; ☎ 10am-10pm; mains Tk 100) It's hard to find but persist, because this little chestnut is well worth the hunt. Without even trying, the super-chilled atmosphere encourages you to linger far longer than you intended and, just as you've finished your delicious sandwiches and salad and plucked up the courage to face the outside world again, you spy the rich, creamy chocolate cake and kiss goodbye to the afternoon. Everything is freshly and hygienically made, and the walls are often adorned with the works of local artists. The breakfast is great too. To find it, turn onto Rd 13 (formerly Rd 32) from Mirpur Rd and take the first right. It's a block up on the left.

Malancha Restaurant (Map pp56-7; 50 New Elephant Rd; mains Tk 120) The many students in this neighbourhood fill their tummies on the cheap and memorable fried chicken and delectable kebabs up for grabs here.

Santoor (Map pp56-7; ☎ 812 3336; Mirpur Rd; mains Tk 150) Simply superb Bengali cooking! The higher than normal prices are justified by both the food and the prim-and-proper atmosphere.

Sung Garden Restaurant (Map pp56-7; ☎ 831 251; 65 North-South Rd; mains Tk 200-250) It might be discreet but that hasn't prevented the well-to-do of Dhaka finding this little Chinese restaurant. The service is attentive and the dishes delectable. Everything about the place is immaculately clean.

Xian (Map pp56-7; ☎ 861 9805; 126 Elephant Rd; mains Tk 250) A popular and refined Chinese restaurant where you're expected to dress sharp and enjoy the equally smart food.

Bigger and bolder than Xian, and certainly not the place for an intimate meal, is **Xinxian** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 815 3745; Mirpur Rd; mains Tk 250).

The two branches of **Yummy Yummy** (Map pp56-7), on Mirpur Rd and Airport Rd, and **Bronx Café** (Map pp56-7; Mirpur Rd) will offer you similar homely reminders.

Gulshan Area

Gulshan area has the widest range of restaurants in the country and is the best place in which to indulge.

Gulshan Plaza Restaurant (Map p62; Gulshan DIT II; ☎ 7am-midnight; mains Tk 90) Cheap and basic workman's restaurant that has all your Bangladeshi favourites, as well as kebabs and roast chickens – all of which are near enough perfect. The boss is English-speaking.

King's Confectionary (Map p62; ☎ 989 4321; House 25, Rd 11, Block F, Banani; ☎ 7am-10.30pm; lunch Tk 100) Not only does it have a good range of light lunches and a mouth-watering selection of cakes (including Portugal's finest, the *pastéis de Belém* for Tk 70), but it gets one of Dhaka's only green-and-social awards for running a bring-and-buy scheme for old clothes. All proceeds go to charity.

Dhaba (Map p62; Rd 11, Banani; mains from Tk 120) Come and pretend you're on a tropical beach in this foliage-covered, beach shack-style restaurant selling what it describes as 'street food', but this is civilised street food and very tasty it is too.

El Toro (Map p62; ☎ 885 2863; House 1A, Rd 138, Gulshan I; ☎ 11.30am-10.30pm; mains Tk 160) The dark and cool el Toro is the only Mexican restaurant in Bangladesh, and surely one of the best on the Indian subcontinent. The chunky chicken quesadilla is a Trojan Horse of flavour – it looks benign on the plate but stages a coup in your mouth. They even have cocktails...sort of.

Cofi II (Map p62; Gulshan DIT II; mains Tk 180) One of the current hot spots with younger expats and locals for after-work drinks (non-alcoholic of course), stingy but enjoyable meals, and internet use. Try the chicken cooked in honey. It's on the second floor of the shopping centre.

Kebab-E-Q (Map p62; ☎ 989 1301; House 48, Rd 11, Banani; mains Tk 200) Downstairs is like eating in someone's front room and upstairs is like

chowing down in the jungle, but what exactly will you be chowing down? Some memorable Bangladeshi treats.

Samdado Restaurant (Map p62; ☎ 882 8499; House 27, Rd 35, Gulshan II; ☎ 12-3pm & 5-11pm; mains Tk 200) Sleek design and sleek food characterise this lonely Japanese restaurant.

ourpick Spaghetti Jazz (Map p62; ☎ 882 2062; 43 North Gulshan II; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 6.30-10pm; mains 400) An excellent Italian restaurant, just off DIT II Circle, that produces pastas and pizzas stuffed with cheese in just the right places, and covered in tomatoes just where they're needed. Very popular with expats.

Topkapi (Map p62; ☎ 881 2646; 134 Gulshan Ave; lunch buffet Tk 450) This is one of several large and similar ventures on Gulshan Ave whose all-you-can-eat lunch buffets are much less tacky than the venues themselves. Also open for dinner.

Spitfire's Barbeque & Grill (Map p62; ☎ 885 1930; cnr Rd 55 & Gulshan Ave; ☎ 11.30am-3pm & 6-11pm; mains Tk 400-1000) Located in the heart of the diplomatic quarter, the bevy of shiny 4WDs with ambassadorial standards and multi-national logos should tell you something about both the quality and price of the food here. Steaks are the staple, but you can also opt for quail and duck breast (but it would be cheaper to wait until you get back home). The atmosphere is far more relaxed than you'd expect.

Khazana (Map p62; ☎ 882 6127; Gulshan Ave; mains Tk 400-1000) Khazana, next door to Spitfire, is its Indian-cuisine equivalent, though it's much more of a shirt-and-tie kind of place.

For some 'what-you-see-is-what-you-get relief, head to **Dominous Pizza** (Map p62; Rd 10) or **Helvetia** (Map p62; Tower Hamlet, 16 Kemal Ataturk Ave, Banani). There's also **Club Gelato** (Map p62; Rd 11, Banani), a perfect replica of an Italian café, serving posh coffee and every rainbow-coloured flavour of ice cream.

DRINKING

There are licensed bars at the **Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel** (Map pp56-7) and the **Sheraton Hotel** (Map pp56-7).

For a cheaper beer (Tk 160 for a cold Heineken) try the **Peacock Restaurant** (Map pp56-7) or the **Sukura Restaurant** (Map pp56-7), both located opposite the Sheraton. A discreet mutter at other similar establishments might also prove fruitful.

Not quite as racy but certainly very tasty is the cha (tea) brewed up by the **Mohamad**

Isobali Teashop (Map pp56-7). This tea stand, which rickshaw-wallahs insist is the best in the city, is about halfway between the Hotel Orchard Plaza and the Hotel Victory in Central Dhaka.

ENTERTAINMENT

Cinemas

With the plethora of Bengali movies available (p33), cinemas only very occasionally play mainstream Western films. Check newspapers. Expats find the range of pirated DVDs is adequate compensation for the lack of variety on the big screen.

Sport

There are often cricket, soccer or hockey matches at the National Stadium; check English-language newspapers for details. Women usually don't go to sporting events – it's considered unseemly.

Traditional Music & Dance

The best place for cultural performances is **Shilpakala Academy** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 956 2801), the national academy of fine art and the performing arts. The major cultural event of the year is the month-long **Asian Art Biennial** in November (held on odd-numbered years). The exhibition, which spills over into the National Museum, attracts top artists and the quality is high. Contact the Shilpakala Academy for details of other upcoming events. The academy is in a side street off Segun Bagicha Rd, next to the National Art Gallery.

Cultural events are also held at **Shishu Academy** (Map pp56-7; Old High Court Rd), southwest of the Supreme Court; the **National Museum** (Map pp56-7; Kazi Nazrul Islam Ave), 1km northwest of the Supreme Court; **Osmani Auditorium** (Map pp56-7; Abdul Ghani Rd), 1km southeast of the Supreme Court; and **Dhaka University** (Map pp56-7). Finding out about events is a challenge – they seem to be advertised only among the cultural elite. Your best option is to ask at the Shilpakala Academy or the **Alliance Francaise** (Map pp56-7; Mirpur Rd).

SHOPPING

Clothing

Dhaka is a fantastic place for purchasing cheap ready-made garments, all of which are produced locally for export. If you're ready to haggle, then head for **Banga Bazar** (Map p51; Fulbaria Rd), a block west of Gulistan

bus station. Although some of the clothes are seconds, with small flaws, most are over-runs. Banga Bazar is usually closed on Friday, but always check.

For easier but pricier purchasing, try the upmarket clothing shops around the Gulshan area.

Handicrafts

Many handicraft shops accept credit cards. Most open at 9am and close between 7pm and 9pm, and are closed on Friday.

For painless shopping, the Pan Pacific Sonargaon and Sheraton Hotels have handicraft shops in their malls, but you can pay less elsewhere, including at the row of shops on New Elephant Rd.

If you're looking for jewellery, avoid buying items made from white conch shells in Shankharia Bazar; other seashells and corals; anything made of ivory; and jade products that may have come from Burma – all these items come with bad karma.

Leading handicraft shops and jewellery shops:

Aarong Handicrafts (www.brac-aarong.com) Gulshan (Map p62; Gulshan-Tejgaon Link Rd, Gulshan I); Lalmatia (Map pp56-7; 1/1, Block A, Mirpur Rd) The biggest name in quality handicrafts. Aarong is the retail branch of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), which aims to create employment for economically and socially marginalised people through the promotion of traditional Bangladeshi handicrafts.

Halima Handicrafts (11/20 Iqbal Rd, Block A, Mohammadpur) A project to help abandoned and widowed women support themselves and their children by producing goods such as wall hangings, bedspreads, cushions and tablecloths.

Kumudini Gulshan (Map p62; 74 Gulshan Ave); Mogh Bazar (Map pp56-7; Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, Kazi Nazrul Islam Ave) Specialises in jute products.

Mona Jewellers (Map pp56-7; 13 Baitul Mukarram Market, Nayapaltan)

Monno Ceramics (Map pp56-7; 334 New Elephant Rd, Mogh Bazar) For modern ceramics.

Monno Fabrics (Map p62; DIT II Circle, Gulshan)

Markets

The city's largest market is **New Market** (Map pp56-7; Mirpur Rd; ☹ closed Mon afternoon & Tue all day). You can find almost anything here including maps, material, saris and household items. It's a great place to get kitted up in local gear. You can find pre-made *salwar kameez* (a long dress-like tunic worn by women over baggy trousers) for as low as Tk 200.

Chandni Chowk Bazar (Map pp56-7), east across the street from New Market, is best place for local fabrics. It's also closed on Monday afternoon and all day Tuesday.

Stadium Arcade (Map pp56-7), north of the National Stadium, has an array of electrical goods, CDs and DVDs.

DIT II Market (Map p62), with its intense but friendly atmosphere, is particularly fascinating for its ground-floor fish and livestock market. The cockroaches look healthier than the chickens, and are even more free-range. Tucked away on the first floor of the market are a couple of framing stores that sell Bengali art.

Rickshaw Art

Bangsai Rd (Bicycle St; Map p51), in Old Dhaka's Bangsal, is the place to buy rickshaw parts. For rickshaw art try further along Bangsal Rd in Nazira Bazar, or Bangla Duair Lane. The art is painted on strips of tin and vinyl, and will fit in most suitcases. Prices are around Tk 50, sometimes more if it's special. Bargaining is required, of course.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

There are several airlines in Bangladesh:

Best Air (☎ 988 2404) Office at the domestic airport.

Biman (Map pp56-7; ☎ 955 9610; Dilkusha II Circle, Motijheel)

GMG Airlines (Map pp56-7; ☎ 711 4155/7; Sena Kayan Bhaban, 13th fl, Motijheel)

United Airways (☎ 895 7640; www.uabdl.com) At the domestic airport.

GMG and United are the most reliable, both in schedules and safety. Routes and prices vary little between the competitors.

At the time of writing, there were services to Barisal (35 minutes), Chittagong (50 minutes), Jessore (40 minutes), Cox's Bazar (40 minutes), and Sylhet (45 minutes). Prices and times change constantly, and don't expect any of them to stick to their schedule.

See also regional chapters and p169.

Boat

Book 1st- and 2nd-class Rocket (paddle-wheel) tickets at the **Bangladesh Inland Waterway Transport Corporation office** (BIWTC; Map pp56-7; ☎ 955 9779, 891 4771; ☹ Sun-Wed to 5pm, Thu to 2pm, closed Fri & Sat) in Motijheel, a block east of Dilkusha Circle I. You may be told that only 1st-class tickets can

be booked from this office. A smile and some persistence should change this policy.

The Rocket departs from Sadarghat (Map p51) and, on rare occasions, from Badam Tole boat terminal (Map p51), 1km north of Sadarghat. Get there in plenty of time. The trip to Khulna takes from 27 to 30 hours. Fares to Khulna are roughly Tk 1010/610/150 for 1st/2nd/deck class, depending on which Rocket you catch. Prices are sequentially less, depending on where you want to jump off along the way. For an explanation of classes see p175.

Boats depart for Khulna every day (except Friday) at 6pm sharp.

Those travelling deck class (good luck convincing someone to sell you a deck-class ticket) may want to stake a place before the hordes arrive. You could pay a local to occupy a place for you, sitting all day for a fee of around Tk 50.

Private launches operate up and down the major rivers but most head south. Short-distance destinations reached by services from Dhaka include Bandura (30km west), Munshiganj (25km southeast) and Srinigar (20km southwest). Long-distance destinations include Barisal (110km south), Bhola (110km south), Chandpur (60km southeast), Madaripur (60km southwest) and Patuakali (40km south).

Short-distance launches travel during the day. The large long-distance launches travel at night, arriving at Sadarghat in the morning and remaining there all day, until departing at around 6pm or 7pm. Tickets are usually sold on board on the day of departure and require some bargaining.

Bus

The bus 'system' in Bangladesh teeters between mind-bogglingly chaotic and surprisingly organised. When you arrive at a bus station, you will be swamped by panic-stricken men shouting like auctioneers. When you so much as mutter your intended destination, you will be frantically shunted onto a bus as if it's going to leave at any second, only to have to then wait for it to leave in its own sweet time. For your own safety and sanity, take the train if it's possible.

The government **Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation** (BRTC; DIT Ave) buses leave from Kamalpur station (Map pp56–7). It's best forgotten as the service is far inferior to that of the private lines.

GABTALI BUS STATION

The largest bus station in Dhaka, **Gabtali** (Map p48) is on the northwestern side of town on Dhaka-Aricha Hwy (an extension of Mirpur Rd), 8km from the heart of the city. (It will cost Tk 5 by bus to get to the city from Gulistan bus station.) It's a madhouse; be on guard for pickpockets (particularly after dark), but in general, people are very friendly and helpful. Most of the buses leaving from here are the cheaper 'local' buses. Luxury buses leave from in front of the relevant offices in the city centre.

Buses for most destinations leave every 20 to 30 minutes. Travel times vary considerably depending on traffic in Dhaka.

Gabtali serves destinations in the northwest and southwest such as Savar (Tk 30), Jessore (express/chair coach Tk 230/325, 6½ hours) and Khulna (Tk 280, eight hours). Buses leave between 7am and 4.30pm.

Between around 7.30am and 11pm buses leave for Barisal (Tk 250, five to seven hours), Bogra (Tk 120, five hours), Rangpur (Tk 250, eight hours), Dinajpur (Tk 200, 9½ hours) and Rajshahi (Tk 250, six hours).

SAYEDABAD BUS STATION

Sayedabad bus station (Map p48; Hatkhola Rd) is 1km before Jatrabari Circle, on the southeastern side of town. Buses leave every half an hour or so to destinations in the south and west, such as Comilla (Tk 60, three hours, between 5.30am and 10.30pm), Chittagong (Tk 200, six hours, between 5am and midnight) and Sylhet (Tk 200, five hours, between 5am and 11.30pm).

Fares to Barisal, Jessore, Khulna and Kushtia are the same as those from Gabtali.

For travel to Chittagong, the best bus companies are along a one-block stretch on Inner Circular Rd in the Nayapaltan area near the New Hotel Yeameni International. They charge between Tk 450 and Tk 600 depending on the class, and take six hours.

There are also buses from here to Cox's Bazar (Tk 400, 10 hours). Comparable companies serving Chittagong Division are **Soudia** (☎ 801 8445), **Hanif** (☎ 831 3869) and **Green Line** (☎ 7100301). Private chair coaches usually leave from around 7am onwards.

MOHAKHALI BUS STATION

The **Mohakhali bus station** (Map p62; Mogh Bazar Rd) is 2km south of Banani. From here buses

head north for Mymensingh (Tk 180, 4½ hours) and Tangail (Tk 80, 2½ hours) every 20 or 30 minutes, between around 6am and 8.30pm.

GULISTAN (FULBARIA) BUS STATION

Finally, there's **Gulistan (Fulbaria) bus station** (Map p51; North-South Rd), in the heart of town at Gulistan Crossing. Most buses depart from a block east at the chaotic intersection of Bangabandhu Ave and Toyenbee Rd. It's extremely crowded and traffic jams in the area are constant. Most buses are local and people are stuffed into them like sardines. Destinations include greater Dhaka as well as many towns within 30km or so of Dhaka, such as Mograpara (Old Sonargaon).

Train

Dhaka's main train station is **Kamlapur station** (Map pp56–7) in Motijheel. Many trains also stop at the smaller Banani and Airport train stations, both of which are more convenient if you're staying in Gulshan area. Buying tickets is easy and there's a large timetable in English. Double-check it for accuracy because the schedules change slightly in the summer and the board may not reflect this. The inquiry counter, which is open until 11pm, and the chief inspector are both helpful. The table below shows some examples of express trains from Dhaka. If you've just arrived from India, you will be in for a shock when you see how comparatively organised everything is here.

Destination	Departure	Approximate Duration (hr)
Sylhet	6.40am & 10pm	7
Sylhet	2pm	8
Chittagong	7.40am	7
Chittagong	3pm & 11pm	8
Chittagong	4.20pm	6
Khulna	6.20am	10
Mymensingh	10.10pm	4
Rajshahi	2.25pm	7
Rajshahi	11.20pm	6

GETTING AROUND

To/From Zia International Airport

The cheapest way to get to the city centre from the airport is by bus. They're extremely crowded, so it's possibly not a viable option if you have a lot of luggage. You'll find buses out on the main highway (Airport Rd), a five-

minute walk from the airport. The fare is less than Tk 10 to most places. After 8pm you may have difficulty finding one.

There's a fixed-rate taxi booth just outside the airport exit. Taxis arranged through this booth will cost around Tk 750 for the journey into central Dhaka. If you go straight to the taxi drivers you should be able to negotiate a cheaper fare, but after a long international flight most people can't be bothered with the additional hassle this entails.

To get to the airport, buses and tempos (shared auto-rickshaw) leave Gulistan bus station throughout the day and cost around Tk 8. A baby taxi (auto-rickshaw) will probably cost a little over Tk 100 and a taxi around Tk 150. Rickshaws aren't allowed at the airport or on the major highway (Airport Rd) passing the airport.

Baby Taxi

Travel by baby taxi (known as auto-rickshaws or tuk-tuks in neighbouring countries) is as efficient as it gets in Dhaka, and can be great (hair-raising) fun. Though pricier than rickshaws over short distances, they have the advantage of speed. Despite the presence of meters it will be a rare day that a driver will agree to use one. Bargain before setting off. A baby-taxi fare from, say, Motijheel to Gulshan will cost around Tk 80 to Tk 100.

Bus

Cheaper than cheap, local buses have no English signs, and their numbering is in Bengali. They are always overcrowded, so boarding between major bus stops is virtually impossible. Fares vary, but around Dhaka you won't pay much more than Tk 8. Foreigners almost never use the local buses.

Car

Unless you have an International Driver's Licence, self-driving isn't an option (ironic when you consider how bad some of the locals are at driving!). Even if you do have a licence, hiring a self-drive car for cruising Dhaka (or anywhere else in Bangladesh for that matter) has got to be the silliest idea in the world. However, hiring a car or van with a driver can make a lot of sense (see p177).

There are numerous car/driver-hire places scattered around Dhaka. One is **Dhaka Tours Rent-A-Car Association** (Map pp56-7; ☎ 861 1313), with an office opposite the Sheraton, just off

THE MUSTANS

If you get a baby taxi from one of the larger taxi stands, you may see the driver give a young man a Tk 2 note before departing. This money ultimately goes to one of the *mustans* who wield Mafia-like power over their territories. Baby-taxi drivers have to pay for the privilege of using a public space to park. A man carting cargo through an area controlled by a *mustan* may be stopped by one of his lieutenants and forced to pay a small fee for the right to pass on a public street. Roadside food vendors also have to pay regular tolls to *mustans*. These thugs levy similar tolls on slum-dwellers occupying public lands. Refusal often draws a beating.

Mustans operate all over the country. Popular belief is that the most powerful *mustans* are connected with the major political parties.

Kazi Nazrul Islam Ave. If you venture out of Dhaka you will have to pay extra each day for the driver's food and accommodation. When you are negotiating with any company, make sure you are clear on what is included in the price.

The more upmarket option is to approach one of the big tour companies such as **Bengal Tours** (Map p62; ☎ 883 4716; www.bengaltours.com; Block A, Banani) or **Guide Tours** (Map p62; ☎ 988 6983; www.guidetours.com; 1st fl, Darpan Complex, DIT II Circle, Gulshan), who both charge around Tk 4500 (including fuel and driver's expenses) depending on what you want to do.

Rickshaw

You will find rickshaws (which in Bangladesh means cycle-rickshaws) everywhere, and when the streets are crowded (as they usually are) they're not much slower than anything else that moves. Aim for a basic fare of about Tk 6 for the first kilometre and Tk 5 per kilometre after that, and make your own judgment with regard to *baksheesh* (tip). The

fantastically decked-out cycle-rickshaws of Dhaka are a tourist attraction in their own right (see p34) and you should go for a spin at least once.

Taxi

There are two types of taxis on the roads of Dhaka. The yellow taxis are more spacious, have air-con and are usually cleaner than their black counterparts, but you pay for the difference. Meters in yellow taxis clock more quickly and at a higher rate than the black taxis, but this is often irrelevant because, as with baby taxis, most drivers are reluctant to use the meters.

Tempo

Fast and cheap to use, tempos are a convenient way to travel if you aren't carrying much luggage and don't mind rib-cage compression. The close quarters might make women (and those around them) uncomfortable.

A trip from Gabtali bus station to Farm Gate costs around Tk 10.