



Kolkata (Calcutta)

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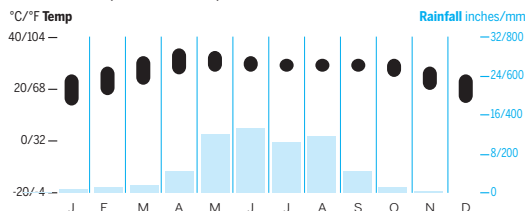
Why Go?

India's second-biggest city is a daily festival of human existence, simultaneously noble and squalid, cultured and desperate. By its old spelling, Calcutta conjures up images of human suffering to most Westerners. But locally, Kolkata is regarded as India's intellectual and cultural capital. While poverty is certainly in your face, the dapper Bengali gentry continues to frequent grand old gentlemen's clubs, back horses at the Calcutta Racetrack and tee off at some of India's finest golf courses.

As the former capital of British India, Kolkata retains a feast of colonial-era architecture, albeit much in a photo-genic state of semi-collapse. Meanwhile urban slums contrast with dynamic new-town suburbs and a rash of air-conditioned shopping malls. Kolkata's also the ideal place to experience the mild, fruity tang of Bengali cuisine. Friendlier than India's other mega-cities, this is a city you 'feel' more than simply visit.

When to Go

Kolkata (Calcutta)



Oct The city dresses up magnificently for the colourful mayhem of Durga Puja.

Nov-Jan Cool and dry; there's a November film festival and a big book fair in January.

May-Sep Best avoided unless you're prepared for a very serious drenching.

Food

Fruity and mildly spiced, Bengali food favours the sweet, rich notes of jaggery (palm-sugar), *daab* (young coconut), *malai-kari* (coconut milk) and *posto* (poppy seed). Typical Bengali curry types include the light, coriander-scented *jhol*, drier spicier *jhal* and richer, ginger-based *kalia*. Strong mustard notes feature in *shorshe* curries and *paturi* dishes that come steamed in a banana leaf. *Gobindobhog bhaat* (steamed rice) or *luchi* (small puris) are the usual accompaniment. More characteristic than meat or chicken (*murgir*) are *chिंगri* (river prawns) and excellent fish, particularly white *ruí* (rohu), fatty *chital*, cod-like *bhekti* and tasty but bone-filled *ilish* (hilsa). Excellent vegetarian choices include *mochar ghonto* (mashed banana-flower, potato and coconut), *doi begun* (eggplant in creamy sauce) and *shukto*, a favourite lunchtime starter combining at least five different vegetables in a milk-based sauce. Bengali desserts and sweets are legendary. Most characteristic are *mishti dhoi* (curd deliciously sweetened with jaggery), *rasgulla* (syrupy sponge balls) and *cham-cham* (double-textured curd-based fingers).

DON'T MISS

Sampling distinctive **Bengali food**, walking the chaotic **back alleys**, riding the Hooghly **ferries**, taking a **motor-bike tour** to see more of the city and – if you've got more time – an excursion to the **Sundarbans**.

Top Festivals

- » Dover Lane Music Conference (www.thedoverlanemusicconference.in, late Jan) Indian classical music and dance at Rabindra Sarovar.
- » Kolkata Boi Mela (www.kolkatabookfaironline.com, late Jan/early Feb) Asia's biggest book fair.
- » Saraswati Puja (early Feb) Prayers for educational success, all dress in yellow.
- » Rath Yatra (Jun/Jul) Major Krishna chariot festival similar to the Puri equivalent.
- » Durga Puja (www.durga-puja.org, Oct, see p457) Kolkata's biggest festival.
- » Lakshmi Puja (full moon after Durga Puja) and Kali Puja (Diwali) feature more idol dunking.
- » Kolkata Film Festival (www.kff.in, mid-Nov) Week-long festival of Bengali and international movies.

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

The city has three major train stations Howrah, Sealdah and 'Kolkata' (Chitpore). The airport is well connected domestically and has a modest range of international flights. Buses arrive frequently from Bangladesh and regional destinations.

Fast Facts

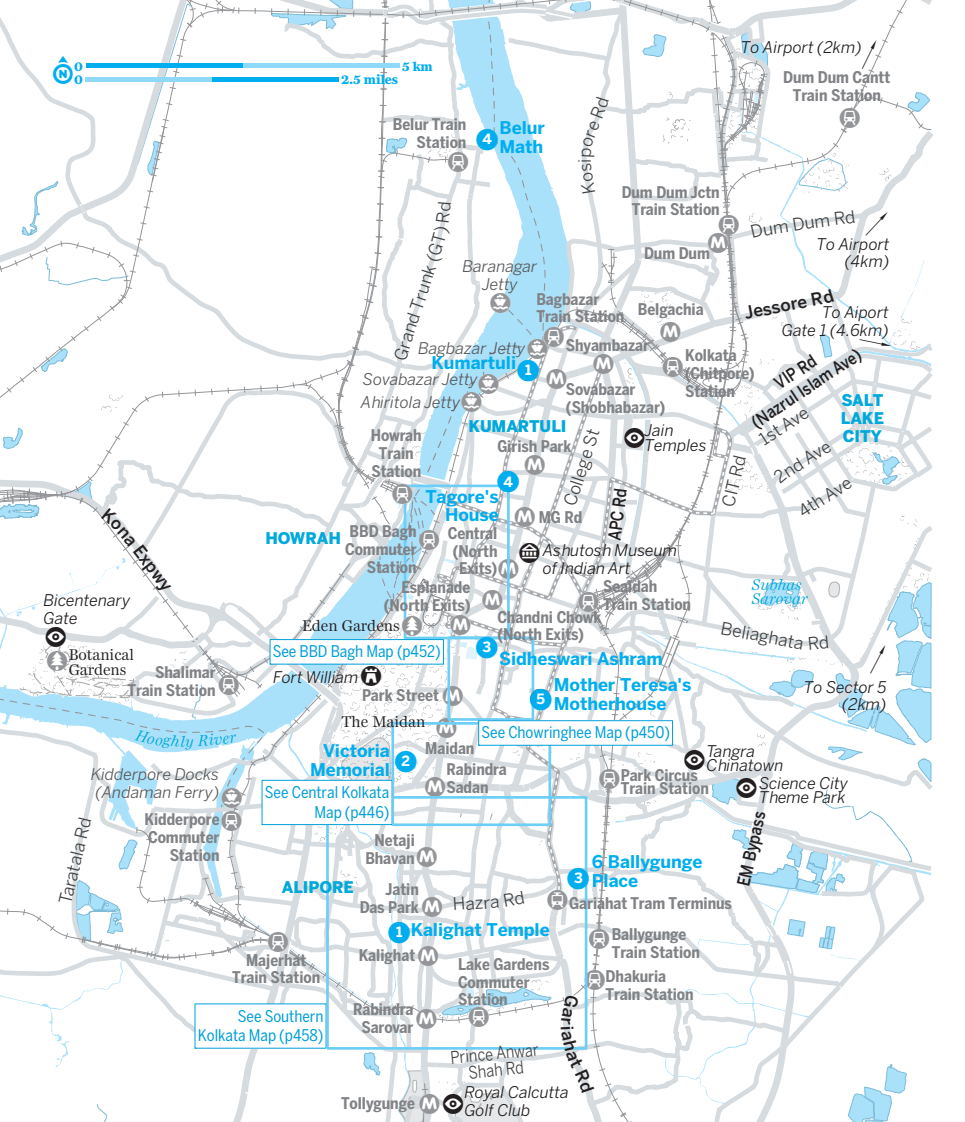
- » Population: 14.7 million
- » Area: 185 sq km
- » Telephone code: 033
- » Main language: Bengali
- » Sleeping prices:
\$ below ₹1200, \$\$ ₹1200 to ₹10,000, \$\$\$ above ₹10,000

Top Tip

Come for the head-spinning contrasts and disarmingly human quality of the city rather than for specific sights.

Resources

- » Bengali Recipes (<http://sutapa.com>)
- » Tourist office (www.wbtourism.com/kolkata/index.htm)
- » News & Listings (www.calcuttaweb.com)
- » Classified ads (<http://kolkata.quikr.com>, <http://kolkata.clickindia.com>)



Kolkata Highlights

1 Watch goddesses come to life in the curious lanes of **Kumartuli** (p455) or on Kalighat Rd near the famous **Kalighat Temple** (p456)

2 Ponder the contradictions of the magnificent **Victoria Memorial** (p446) which remains Kolkata's most splendid building, over 60

years after the end of the colonial era

3 Sample lipsmackingly authentic Bengali cuisine cheaply at **Sidheshwari Ashram** (p463) or in style at **6 Ballygunge Place** (p466)

4 Discover the enlightened universalist idealism of Ramakrishna in **Belur Math**

(p456) and Rabindranath Tagore, India's greatest modern poet, at **Tagore's House** (p454), of which Kolkatans are understandably proud

5 Volunteer to help the destitute at **Mother Teresa's 'Motherhouse'** (p448)

History

Although Kalikata (now Kalighat) had been a much-revered temple for centuries, the Kolkata area was very much a rural backwater when British merchant Job Charnock showed up in 1686. He considered the site appropriate for a new, defensible colonial settlement and within a few decades a miniature version of London was sprouting stately buildings and English churches amid wide boulevards and grand formal gardens. But the grand illusion vanished abruptly at Calcutta's frayed edges where Indians servicing the Raj mostly lived in cramped, overcrowded 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. The nawab sought aid from the French but was soundly defeated at the Battle of Plassey (now Palashi), thanks mainly to the treachery of former allies. 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 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 1947's 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 bastis (slums). 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 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 the closed Pakistan (later Bangladesh) border. 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. Well-intentioned attempts to set strict rent controls have since backfired: where tenants still pay a few rupees in monthly rent, landlords have no interest in maintaining or upgrading properties so many fine old buildings are crumbling before one's eyes.

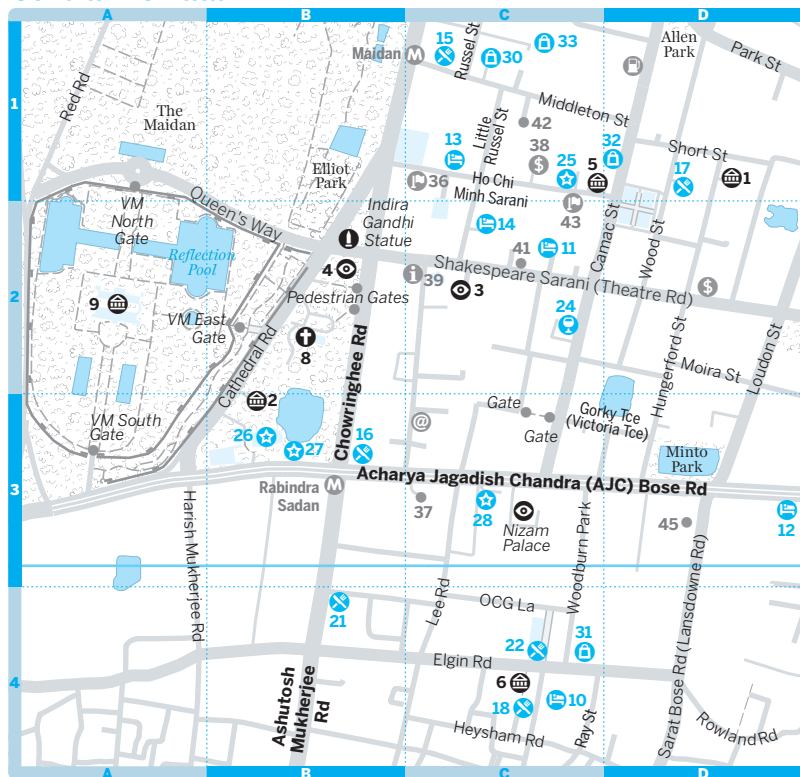
KOLKATA IN...

Three Days

On the first day admire the **Victoria Memorial** and surrounding attractions then visit India Tourism to grab a Marble Palace permit (to be used two days hence), before dining and dancing on Park or Camac Sts. On day two wander through the crumbling colonial-era wonderland of **BBD Bagh**, experience the fascinating/disturbing alley-life of **Old Chinatown** and **Barabazar** and observe **Howrah Bridge** from colourful **Mullik Ghat flower market**. Refresh yourself with a beer at the **Fairlawn**. Day 3 visit **Marble Palace** and surrounding attractions, continuing to **Kumartuli** directly or by a vastly longer loop via **Dakshineswar** and **Belur Math**, returning by boat.

One Week

To the above, consider adding a day or more volunteering. Visit **Mother Teresa's Motherhouse**, continue by tram to **South Park St Cemetery** and dine at **Shiraz**. Experience the contrasts of **Southern Kolkata**, its dawn **laughing clubs**, the great Bengali food, the goat sacrifices at **Kalighat** and the **art galleries** of Gariahat. Ponder the moral dilemmas of taking/not taking a hand-drawn **rickshaw**, of playing golf or of having a flutter at the **racecourse**. Join a tour to the Sundarbans in West Bengal.



In 2001 Calcutta officially adopted the more phonetic spelling, Kolkata. Around the same time the city administration implemented a new, relatively business-friendly attitude that has encouraged a noticeable economic resurgence. The most visible results are numerous suburban shopping malls and apartment towers plus the rapid emergence of Salt Lake City's Sector 5 as Kolkata's alternative corporate and entertainment centre, albeit well off most tourists' radar.

🕒 Sights

CENTRAL KOLKATA

Victoria Memorial

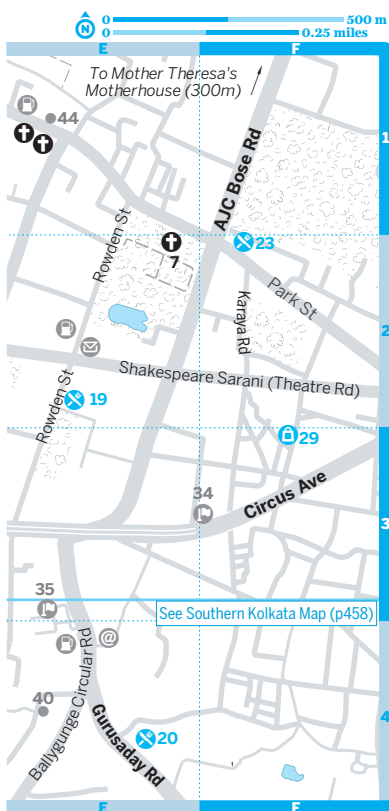
HISTORIC BUILDING

(VM; Map p446; Indian/foreigner ₹10/150; ☎10am-5pm Tue-Sun, last tickets 4.30pm) The incredible Victoria Memorial is a vast, beautifully proportioned festival of white marble: think US Capitol meets Taj Mahal. Had it been built for a beautiful Indian princess rather than a dead colonial queen, this would surely be

considered one of India's greatest buildings. It was designed to commemorate Queen Victoria's 1901 diamond jubilee, but construction wasn't completed until nearly 20 years after her death.

Don't miss the statues as you enter the first hallway: King George V faces his wife Mary but looks more a queen himself in his camp breeches. To the left, prints and paintings are displayed on hard-board hoardings that jar with the gallery's original splendour. The soaring central chamber remains very impressive and leads through to the **Kolkata Gallery**, an excellent, even-handed exhibition tracing the city's colonial-era history.

Even if you don't want to go in, the building is still worth admiring from afar: there's a magnificently photogenic view across reflecting ponds from the northeast. Or you can get closer by paying your way into the large, well-tended **park** (admission ₹4:



☉5.45am-5.45pm). By day, entrance is from the north or south gates (with ticket booths at both), though you can exit to the east.

In the evenings the VM makes a spectacular canvas for a 45-minute English-language **sound-and-light show** (Indian/foreigner ₹10/20; ☉7.15pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb, 7.45pm Tue-Sun Mar-Jun) that's better than you might initially fear from the very dated opening slide sequence. Ticket booth and entry are from the east gate. Seating is outside and uncovered; there are no shows in summer.

Around the Victoria Monument AREA
With its central crenellated tower, the 1847 **St Paul's Cathedral** (Map p446; Cathedral Rd; ☉9am-noon & 3-6pm) would look quite at home in Cambridgeshire. It has a remarkably wide nave and features a stained-glass west window by pre-Raphaelite maestro Sir Edward Burne-Jones.

The **Academy of Fine Arts** (Map p446; 2 Cathedral Rd; admission free; ☉3-8pm) has a

bright, ground-floor gallery featuring changing exhibitions by local artists but its upstairs museum section remains closed for the foreseeable future. Imaginative private galleries include **Harrington Street Gallery** (Map p446; www.hstreetartscentre.com; 2nd fl, 8 Ho Chi Minh Sarani; ☉2-8pm Mon-Sat) and **Aakriti Gallery** (Map p446; www.aakritiartgallery.com; 1st fl, 12/3A Hungerford St; ☉noon-7pm Mon-Sat).

Loosely styled on Sarnath's classic Buddhist stupa, the **Birla Planetarium** (Map p446; Chowringhee Rd) presents slow-moving, half-hour **star shows** (admission ₹30) in English at 1.30pm and 6.30pm.

Aurobindo Bhawan SACRED SITE
(Map p446; 8 Shakespeare Sarani; ☉8am-8pm) Revolutionary turned guru Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta in 1872 and his grand childhood mansion-home has been preserved as an Aurobindo centre. Its garden forms an oasis of peace in the city centre and there's an open-air meditation space where you can sit as you wish or join half-hour **group meditations** at 7pm on Thursdays or Saturdays.

The Maidan PARK
(Map p446, p450) After the 'Black Hole' fiasco, a moated 'second' Fort William was constructed in 1758 in octagonal, Vaubanesque form. 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 moidan), a 3km-long park that is today as 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*.

New Market & Esplanade AREA
(Map p450) Before 8am, most of New Market's handicraft touts are still sleeping, so come early to admire the distinctive brick **clocktower** and atmospheric **Hogg Market**. Walking towards Esplanade, notice the fascinatingly crumbling facade of **Futnani Chambers**, the classic '50s-style **Elite Cinema** and colonial-era **Metropolitan Building**. A block north the fanciful **Tipu Sultan's Mosque** hides almost invisibly behind market stalls. Rising above chaotic Esplanade bus station, the 1828 **Sahid Minar** is a 48m-tall round-topped obelisk originally celebrating an 1814 British military victory over Nepal.

Indian Museum MUSEUM
(Map p450; www.indianmuseumkolkata.org; Chowringhee Rd; Indian/foreigner ₹10/150, camera ₹50;

Central Kolkata

📍 Sights

- 1 Aakriti Gallery D1
- 2 Academy of Fine Arts B3
- 3 Aurobindo Bhawan C2
- 4 Birla Planetarium B2
- 5 Harrington St Gallery C1
- 6 Netaji Bhawan C4
- 7 South Park St Cemetery E2
- 8 St Paul's Cathedral B2
- 9 Victoria Memorial A2

🛏 Sleeping

- 10 Allenby Inn C4
- 11 Astor C2
- 12 Chrome D3
- 13 Golden Park C1
- 14 Kenilworth C2

🍴 Eating

- Drive Inn (see 30)
- 15 Fire & Ice C1
- 16 Haldiram B3
- 17 Jalapenos D1
- 18 Kewpies C4
- 19 Kookie Jar E2
- 20 Mainland China E4
- 21 Momo Corner B4
- 22 Oh! Calcutta C4
- 23 Shiraz F2

🍷 Drinking

- Big Ben (see 14)
- Café Thé (see 25)
- 24 Urban Desi C2

🎬 Entertainment

- 25 ICCR C1
- Inox Elgin Rd (see 22)
- 26 Nandan Cinema B3
- Rabindra Sadan (see 26)
- 27 Sisir Mancha B3
- 28 Underground C3
- Venom (see 24)

🛍 Shopping

- 29 Ankur Kala F3
- 30 Classic Books/Earthcare Books C1
- 31 Crossword C4
- 32 Manjusha D1
- Nagaland Emporium (see 41)
- 33 Pragiyotika C1

Information

- 34 Bangladeshi Consulate F3
- 35 Bhutanese Consulate E3
- 36 British Deputy High Commission C1
- 37 FRO C3
- 38 Globe Forex C1
- 39 India Tourism C2
- 40 Manipur State Office E4
- 41 Nagaland State Office C2
- 42 Sikkim State Office C1
- 43 US Consulate C2

Transport

- 44 Biman Bangladesh E1
- 45 China Eastern Airlines D3
- Druk Air (see 35)

🕒 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun, last entry 4pm) Kolkata's old-fashioned main museum fills a colonnaded palace ranged around a central lawn. Extensive exhibits include fabulous 1000-year-old Hindu sculptures, lumpy minerals, a dangling whale skeleton and an ancient Egyptian mummy. Gag at the pickled **human embryos** (gallery 19) and eight-legged goat, spot the surreal **Glyptodon** dinosaur-armadillo (gallery 11) and don't miss the re-assembled 2nd-century BC **Barhut Gateway** (gallery 2). Gallery 15 displays 20 rings and 18 bangles found in the tummy of a gigantic man-eating crocodile. Note that no bags are allowed inside: handbags can be stored at the entrance but don't arrive with a backpack.

Mother Teresa's 'Motherhouse' SACRED SITE (off Map p450; www.motherteresa.org; 54A AJC Bose Rd; 🕒 visits 8am-noon & 3-6pm Fri-Wed)

Pilgrims arrive here in droves to pay homage at Mother Teresa's large, sober **tomb**. Exhibits in a small adjacent **museum** (🕒 9am-noon & 3-5.30pm) include Teresa's worn sandals and battered enamel dinner-bowl. And upstairs, the **'Mother's room'** is where she worked and slept from 1953 to 1997, preserved in all its simplicity.

The charity's numerous Kolkata sites welcome short-term volunteers, qualified or not. Start by attending a briefing two blocks north at **Sishu Bhavan** (78 AJC Bose Rd; 🕒 3pm Mon, Wed & Fri).

Please do not give anything (including sweets, milk powder, toothpaste etc) to the handful of professional beggars who have 'claimed the territory' outside the Motherhouse: some, including an eloquent Eurasian mother-daughter team, are sophisticated players but their activities cause regular problems

for the Mission staff and the 'profession' is so lucrative that we've been told that the children refuse to take available school places.

South Park Street Cemetery CEMETERY
(Map p446; admission ₹20 donation appropriate; ☉8am-4.45pm) 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 to access the then-new South Park Street Cemetery. These days the cemetery remains a wonderful oasis of calm featuring mossy Raj-era graves from rotundas to soaring pyramids, all jostling for space in a lightly manicured jungle.

Netaji Bhawan MUSEUM
(Map p446; www.netaji.org; 38/2 Elgin Rd; adult/child ₹5/2; ☉11am-4pm Tue-Sun) Worth a look if you're lurching at Kewpies, this house-museum celebrates the life and vision of controversial independence radical Subhas Chandra Bose, maintaining several rooms decorated in 1940s style. It was Bose's brother's residence from which Subhas made his famous 'Great Escape' from British-imposed house arrest in January 1941. The original getaway car is parked in the drive.

BBD BAGH AREA

BBD Bagh AREA
Originally called Tank Sq, BBD Bagh is a large square centred on a palm-lined central reservoir-lake ('tank') that once supplied the young city's water. Some locals still call it by its later-colonial name **Dalhousie Sq**, commemorating British Lieutenant-Governor Lord Dalhousie. The square is now renamed 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** (Map p452), whose glorious south facade 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.

Although concrete intrusions detract from the overall spectacle, there are many other resplendent colonial-era edifices around the square. **St Andrews Church** (Map p452) has a fine Wren-style spire, the former **Standard Chartered Building** (Map p452; Netaji Subhash Rd) has a vaguely Moorish feel and the red-brick **Standard Buildings**

(Map p452; 32 BBD Bagh) have carved nymphs and wrought-iron balconies at the rear.

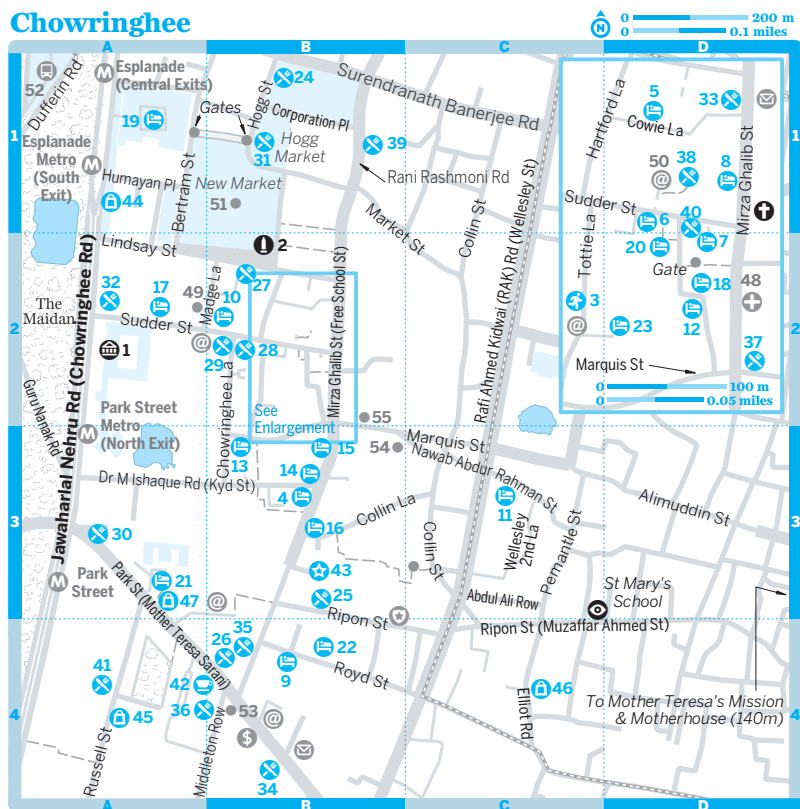
GPO LANDMARK
(Map p452; BBD Bagh) The 1866 General Post Office was built on the ruins of the original Fort William, site of the infamous 'Black Hole of Calcutta'. It sports an imposing cupola and at night, floodlit in pale violet light, looks particularly impressive when viewed across the lake from behind the BBD Bagh minibus stand. Nearby there's a loveable little **philatelic museum** (Map p452; Koilaghat St; admission free; ☉11am-4pm Mon-Sat).

Raj Bhavan HISTORIC BUILDING
(Map p452; http://rajbhavankolkata.nic.in; ☉closed to public) Somewhat resembling the US White House, the grand Raj Bhavan was designed in 1799 along the lines of Kedleston Hall, the Derbyshire home of the Curzon family. By strange coincidence, one of its most famous masters a century later would be none other than Lord Curzon. Today the building is the official residence of the West Bengal governor and visitors may only peep through the ornate giant gates.

High Court HISTORIC BUILDING
(Map p452; http://calcuttahighcourt.nic.in; Esplanade Row West) Another of Kolkata's greatest architectural triumphs is the 19th-century High Court building, loosely modelled on the medieval Cloth Hall in Ypres (Flanders). You can't go inside, but for good exterior views approach from the south walking past the western end of the low-domed West Bengal Assembly building.

Kolkata Panorama MUSEUM
(Map p452; http://tinyurl.com/Kolkpan; 4 Esplanade West; weekdays/weekends ₹10/15; ☉11am-6pm Tue-Sun, last entry 5pm) Within an imposing colonnaded cube that was originally the Town Hall building, this interactive museum introduces the city's heritage through a lively collection of working models. It's well designed, though historically selective, and many foreigners will struggle to appreciate fully the detailed sections on Bengali popular culture. You'll be accompanied by a guide which makes it awkward to 'escape' quickly.

St John's Church CHURCH
(Map p452; KS Roy Rd; ☉8am-5pm) This stone-spired 1787 church is ringed by columns and contains a small, portrait-draped room once used as an office by Warren Hastings, India's first British governor-general (on the right as you enter). The **graveyard** (admission ₹10)



contains two curious octagonal monuments, the **mausoleum of Job Charnock** celebrating Kolkata's disputed 'founder' and a 1902 **Black Hole Memorial** that was moved here in 1940.

Eden Gardens

AREA

The vast Ranji Stadium hosting Kolkata cricket matches is commonly nicknamed for the **Eden Gardens** (Map p452; ☀noon-5pm) that lie behind. Those gardens feature a lake and picturesque **Burmese Pagoda**. Entry is usually limited to the south gate, but a small, more convenient north portal near Gate 12 of Ranji Stadium is occasionally open.

FREE Banking Museum

MUSEUM

(Map p452; ☎22318164; 11th fl, SBI Bldg, Strand Rd; ☀3-5pm Tue, Thu & Sat or by arrangement) This small, professionally presented new museum brings alive the history of Indian banking using archive materials like the original account ledgers of Tagore and of Nehru's father.

NORTH-CENTRAL KOLKATA

Howrah Bridge (Rabindra Setu)

LANDMARK

Howrah Bridge is a 705m-long abstraction of steel cantilevers and traffic fumes. Built during WWII, it's one of the world's busiest bridges and an architectural icon. For the best view, fight your way through the **Mullik Ghat flower market** to **Mullik Ghat**. Photography of the bridge itself is technically prohibited but enforcement appears to be lax of late and if you're stopped here, you might sneak a discreet shot from one of the various river-ferries that ply the Hooghly to the vast 1906 Howrah train station.

Barabazar

AREA

North and northeast of BBD Bagh lies a wide scattering 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 teeming with traders, rickshaw couriers and baggage

Chowringhee

📍 Sights

- 1 Indian Museum A2
- 2 New Market Clocktower B2

🏠 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 3 Backpackers C2

🛏 Sleeping

- 4 Aafreen Tower B3
- 5 Ashreen Guest House D1
- 6 Bawa Walson D1
- 7 Bhagirathi Guest House D2
- 8 Centrepont Guest House D1
- 9 Corporate B4
- 10 Fairlawn Hotel B2
- 11 Hotel Aafreen C3
- 12 Hotel Galaxy D2
- 13 Hotel Pioneer International B3
- 14 Hotel Pushpak B3
- 15 Hotel VIP InterContinental B3
- 16 Housez 43 B3
- 17 Lytton Hotel A2
- 18 Modern Lodge D2
- 19 Oberoi Grand A1
- 20 Paragon Hotel D2
- 21 Park Hotel A3
- 22 Sunflower Guest House B4
- 23 Timestar Hotel D2

🍴 Eating

- 24 Aminia B1
- 25 Arsalan B3
- 26 Bar-B-Q B4
- 27 Blue & Beyond B2
- 28 Blue Sky Cafe B2
- 29 Fresh & Juicy B2
- Gangaur (see 41)
- 30 Hot Kati Rolls A3
- 31 Hotel Mastan B1
- 32 Jong's/Zaranj A2
- 33 Kathleen Confectioners D1
- 34 Marco Polo B4

- 35 Mocambo B4
- 36 Peter Cat A4
- 37 Prince D2
- Radhuni (see 37)
- 38 Raj's Spanish Cafe D1
- 39 Sidheswari Ashram B1
- 40 Super Chicken D1
- 41 Teej A4

🍷 Drinking

- Ashalayam (see 15)
- Fairlawn Hotel (see 10)
- 42 Flury's A4
- Roxy (see 21)
- Someplace Else (see 21)

🎮 Entertainment

- 43 BQ's Snooker B3
- Tantra (see 21)

🛍 Shopping

- Ashalayam (see 15)
- 44 Hawkers' Market A1
- 45 Karmyog A4
- 46 Local Tailors C4
- 47 Oxford Bookstore A3

Information

- 48 Eastern Diagnostics D2
- 49 Electro Photo-Lab A2
- 50 Gorukh D1
- 51 Nahoum Bakery (for BethEl
Synagogue permits) B1

Transport

- Backpackers (see 3)
- 52 Bus 55A for Botanical Gardens A1
- 53 GMG Airlines B4
- 54 GreenLine B3
- 55 Shohagh Paribahan B2
- United Airways Bangladesh (see 25)

wallahs with impossibly huge packages balanced on their heads. Hidden away amid the paper-merchant district of Old China Bazaar St, the 18th-century **Armenian Church of Nazareth** (Map p452; Armenian St; ☎6am-6pm) was founded in 1707 and is claimed to be Kolkata's oldest place of Christian worship. Gravestones in the peaceful yard outside date back to 1630. The church's low but finely proportioned, whitewashed clocktower-spire is best spied from Bonfield Lane. The larger

1797 Portuguese-Catholic **Holy Rosary Cathedral** (Map p452; Brabourne Rd; ☎6am-11am) has eye-catching crown-topped side towers and an interior whose font is festively kitsch.

Kolkata's Jewish community once numbered around 30,000 but these days barely 40 aging co-religionists turn up at **Moghan David Synagogue** (Map p452; Canning St; ☎by discussion with doorkeeper) for rare celebrations in what looks, from outside, like a tall-spired church. Around the corner, the derelict **Neveh**



Shalome Synagogue (Map p452; Brabourne Rd) is almost invisible behind the shop stalls that use it as a storehouse. Opposite decrepit Pollock St Post Office (once a grand Jewish school building) is **Bethel Synagogue** (Map p452; Pollock St) whose colonnaded interior can

only be visited with written permission, oddly obtained across town from **Nahoum Bakery** (Map p450; Stall F-20, New Market; ☎9.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1pm Sun). Allow two days!

Rising above the colourful shopfronts of ever-fascinating Rabindra Sarani, the 1926

BBD Bagh

📍 Sights

- 1 Armenian Church of Nazareth C2
- 2 Banking Museum..... A5
- 3 BethEl Synagogue C3
- 4 Elephant Gateway D3
- 5 Elite Cinema C6
- 6 Former Nanking Restaurant..... D4
- 7 GPO..... B4
- 8 Hap Hing Chinese Shop C4
- 9 High Court..... A5
- 10 Holy Rosary Cathedral..... C2
- 11 Kolkata Panorama..... A5
- 12 Metropolitan Building..... C6
- 13 Moghan David Synagogue..... C2
- 14 Nakhoda Mosque D2
- 15 Nam Soon D3
- 16 Neveh Shalome Synagogue
Ruin..... C2
- 17 Philatelic Museum B4
- 18 Raj Bhavan B5
- 19 Ranji Stadium..... A6
- 20 Sahid Minar B6
- 21 St Andrew's Church C4
- 22 St John's Church..... A4
- 23 Standard Buildings..... B4
- 24 Standard Chartered Building B3
- 25 Tipu Sultan's Mosque..... C6
- 26 Writers' Building..... B3

🛏 Sleeping

- 27 Bengal Buddhist Association D5
- 28 Broadway Hotel..... D5

- 29 Esplanade Chambers..... D5

🍴 Eating

- 30 Amber/Essence C5
- 31 Anand C5
- 32 KC Das..... C6
- 33 Song Hay..... B5

🍷 Drinking

- Broadway Bar (see 28)
- 34 Rocks..... C5

🛍 Shopping

- 35 Mondal & Sons C4

📄 Information

- 36 West Bengal Tourism B4

🚆 Transport

- 37 Air India D5
- 38 Airport Bus B6
- 39 Computerised Booking Office..... A4
- 40 CSBC Ticket Office B6
- 41 Eastern Railways' Foreign
Tourist Bureau..... B3
- 42 Esplanade Bus Station..... B6
- 43 Minibus to Airport Gate 1 via
Dum Dum..... B4
- 44 Prepaid Taxi Booth..... A1
- 45 Shipping Corporation of India..... A4
- 46 Tram 26 Terminus B1

Nakhoda Mosque (Map p452; 1 Zakaria St) is an impressive confection of red arches bristling with domes and minarets. It was loosely modelled on Akbar's Mausoleum at Sikandra.

Old Chinatown

AREA

For nearly two centuries the area around Phears Lane was home to a predominantly Christian Chinese community, many of whom fled or were interned during a fit of anti-Chinese fervour during the 1962 war. These days 'old' Chinatown is pretty run down but is a fascinating place to glimpse Kolkata's contrasts. On the turn of ragged little Damzen Lane you'll find the shrine-like Chinese church, **Nam Soon** (Map p452). A little further along is an oversized turquoise **gateway** (Map p452; 10 Damzen Lane), built to allow passage for domestic elephants. The once-grand 1924 **Nanking Restaurant** (Map p452; Lushun Sarani) is now a wreck beside which a rubbish

heap supports a community of destitute scavengers who scrape together a miserable existence living in tent-and-box shacks on neighbouring pavements. Very humbling.

Just after dawn, there's a lively **market** scene on Tiretta's Bazaar. It's all closed by 10am, as is the archetypal old Chinese shop, **Hap Hing** (Map p452; 10 Sun Yat Sen St; ☺6am-10am Mon-Sat, 6am-8.30am Sun) where owner Stella Chen can tell you lots more about the community and sells a colour-picture-book/CD set *Chinatown Kolkata* (₹500).

Note that Kolkata has a second Chinatown further east at Tangra where tanneries once produced the leather for the community's many shoe-makers. That rather forbidding area now has only around 50 Chinese families but almost as many Chinese restaurants.

Marble Palace

MUSEUM

(off Map p452; 46 Mukhtaram Babu St; ☺10am-3pm closed Mon & Thu) Resplendent yet slightly

run down, this grand 1835 raja's mansion is astonishingly overstuffed with statues, Victoriana, Belgian glassware and fine if bedraggled paintings including supposedly original works by Murillo, Joshua Reynolds and three by Rubens. Napoleons beat Wellingtons two to one in the music room, which is lavishly floored with marble inlay. The ballroom retains its vast array of candle chandeliers with globes of silvered glass to spread illumination: original 19th-century disco balls! Before arriving you need to get a permission note from one of the tourist offices (see p469). With this note, admission

is technically free. However, the (obligatory) guide solicits tips of ₹50 to ₹100 per group.

To find Marble Palace from MG Rd metro, walk three blocks north to the first traffic light and turn west at 171 Chittaranjan Ave. To continue to Tagore's House, continue west down Muktaram Babu St (there's a great little ₹2 tea stand at no 13 run by a yogi tea-wallah), then turn right on Rabindra Sarani, passing several stone-cutting workshops.

Tagore's House

MUSEUM

(off Map p452; Rabindra Bharati Museum; www.rabin drabharatimuseum.org; 246D Rabindra Sarani; Indian/foreigner ₹10/50, student ₹5/25;

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 re-name Harrington St such that the US found its consulate on a road named for its then arch-enemy, Ho Chi Minh.

Today citizens and taxis mostly use the British-era names while, 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
<i>Central Ave</i>	<i>Chittaranjan (CR) Ave</i>
<i>Chitpore Rd</i>	<i>Rabindra Sarani</i>
<i>Chowringhee Rd</i>	Jawaharlal Nehru Rd
<i>Dalhousie Sq</i>	<i>BBD Bagh</i>
<i>Free School St</i>	<i>Mirza Ghalib St</i>
<i>Harrington St</i>	<i>Ho Chi Minh Sarani</i>
<i>Harrison Rd</i>	Mahatma Gandhi (<i>MG</i>) Rd
<i>Hungerford St</i>	Picasso Bithi
<i>Kyd St</i>	Dr M Ishaque Rd
<i>Lansdowne Rd</i>	<i>Sarat Bose Rd</i>
<i>Loudon St</i>	Dr UM Bramhchari St
<i>Lower Circular Rd</i>	<i>AJC Bose Rd</i>
<i>Old Courthouse St</i>	Hemant Basu Sarani
<i>Park St</i>	Mother Teresa Sarani
<i>Rowden St</i>	Sarojini Naidu Sarani
<i>Theatre Rd</i>	<i>Shakespeare Sarani</i>
<i>Victoria Terrace</i>	<i>Gorky Terrace</i>
<i>Waterloo St</i>	Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula Sarani
<i>Wellesley St</i>	<i>RAK (Rafi Ahmed Kidwai) Rd</i>
<i>Wood St</i>	Dr Martin Luther King Sarani

MOTHER TERESA

For many people, Mother Teresa (1910–97) was the living image of human sacrifice. Born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu to Albanian parents in then-Ottoman Üsküp (now Skopje in Macedonia), she joined the Irish Order of Loreto nuns and worked for over a decade teaching in Calcutta's **St Mary's High School** (92 Ripon St). Horrified by the city's spiralling poverty she established a new order, the **Missionaries of Charity** (www.motherteresa.org) and founded refuges for the destitute and dying. **Nirmal Hriday** (Sacred Heart; Map p458; 251 Kalighat Rd. ☺closed for renovation at the time of research), the first of these, opened in 1952 in a former Kalighat pilgrims' hostel. 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. 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 AIDS and hepatitis problems. However, the organisation was never primarily focused on saving lives, simply offering a little love and dignity to the dying. Before Mother Teresa, even that was an unknown luxury for the truly destitute.

☺10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) Within Rabindra Bharati University, the comfortable 1784 family mansion of Rabindranath Tagore has become a shrine-like museum 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 and an exhibition on his links with Japan. The 1930 photo of Tagore taken with Einstein could win a 'World's Wildest Hair' competition. You'd need an hour to see everything but for many casual visitors a brief glimpse is enough.

Bagbazar-bound trams connect to Kumartuli, passing many fascinating vignettes of Kolkata life.

Kumartuli

AREA

Many of the giant **god effigies** that are immersed in the holy Hooghly during Kolkata's colourful pujas have been made by the *ku-mar* (sculptors) of this enthralling district. Different workshops specialise in creating the straw frames, adding clay coatings or painting the divine features. Craftsmen are busiest from August till November for the Durga and Kali festivals.

There's a great selection of workshops on the narrow lane running two blocks west from 499 Rabindra Sarani. Where

that makes a T-junction turn right for more (Banamali Sakar St). That road ends 300m north at Durgacharan Banerjee St. Turning left here brings you quickly to a ghat where the sculptors' mud-clay is brought in by boat. A tree-shaded riverside stroll north of here passes several small shrines en route to Bagbazar Jetty whence passenger **ferries** cross to Howrah (₹4.50, 20 minutes with two stops, four hourly) and Baranagar (twice hourly).

Ashutosh Museum of Indian Art

MUSEUM

(www.caluniv.ac.in; Centenary Bldg, 87/1 College St; admission ₹10; ☺11.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Priceless antique Indian sculptures, brasswork and Bengali terracotta are displayed with very little fanfare in this dry, but brilliantly endowed museum tucked behind Kolkata University's Central Library. It's down the first lane off College St as you walk north from Colootola Rd. Trams 2 and 5 pass along College St here. While you're in the university area consider visiting the mythic **Indian Coffee House** (1st fl, 15 Bankim Chatterjee St; coffee ₹9, snack meals ₹14-35; ☺9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.30pm & 5-9pm Sun). Once a meeting place of freedom fighters, bohemians and revolutionaries, today its high ceilings and slightly grimy walls ring with deafening student conversation but despite the dishwater coffee, it's perversely fascinating.

Walk up College St and turn right one block before MG Rd (it's 20m down a side lane then upstairs to the left).

MG Rd towards Sealdah Station from here is an inspiring chaos of mouldering generations-old box shops, potion sellers and card-makers beneath dishevelled, occasionally grand old facades.

Heading the other way, numbers 104 to 116 offer colourfully costumed brass-bands for hire.

NORTHERN KOLKATA

This area's long distances and tedious traffic are mitigated if you use a public riverboat from Dakshineswar to Belur Math, then charter a boat onward to Bagbazar. Doing that in reverse is less feasible due to a lack of boat-hire possibilities at Bagbazar.

Sheetalnathji Mandir

JAIN TEMPLE

(www.jaindharmonline.com/pilgri/shitala.htm; Badridas Temple St; donation appropriate; ☺6am-noon & 3-7pm) The best known of a closely grouped trio of Jain temples, this 1867 complex is a dazzling if unrefined pastiche of colourful mosaics, spires, columns and slivered figurines that looks like a work by Gaudi. It's 1.6km from Shyambazar metro.

Dakshineswar

HINDU TEMPLE

(www.dakshineswarkalitemple.org; ☺6.30am-noon & 3-8.30pm) The heart of this vibrant riverside complex is a cream-and-red 1847 Kali Temple shaped like an Indian Sacré-Coeur. The site is where Ramakrishna started his remarkable spiritual journey and his small room in the outer northwest corner of the temple precinct is now a place of special meditative reverence.

A metro extension is under construction to Dakshineswar train station, 400m south of the temple, which has roughly hourly suburban train services from Sealdah (20 minutes) and is the terminus of bus DN9/1 from Dum Dum metro (₹5). Uncovered boats to Belur Math (per passenger/boat ₹8/240, 20 minutes) leave when full from the temples' tree-shaded riverbank. Bring a hat or umbrella.

Belur Math

SACRED SITE

(www.sriramakrishna.org/belur.htm; Grand Trunk Rd; ☺6.30am-noon & 3.30-8.30pm) Set very attractively amid palms and manicured lawns, this large religious centre is the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission, inspired by 19th-century Indian sage Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who preached the unity of all religions. Its centrepiece is the 1938

Ramakrishna Mandir (☺closes 8pm) which somehow manages to look like a cathedral, Indian palace and Istanbul's Aya Sofya all at the same time. Several smaller **shrines** (☺6.30-11.30am & 3.30-5.15pm) near the Hooghly riverbank include the Sri Sarada Devi Temple, entombing the guru's wife.

Accessed from the car park, the beautifully presented dual-level **museum** (admission ₹5; ☺8.30-11.30am & 3.30-5.30pm Tue-Sun) charts Ramakrishna's life and travels, with mock-ups of buildings in which he stayed from Rajasthan to New York.

Minibus 11 and bus 54 run to Esplanade, bus 56 to Howrah. However, to avoid the miserable stop-start traffic, consider chartering a boat to Bagbazar near Kumartuli (₹350). Six daily suburban trains run from Belur Math to Howrah (₹4, 25 minutes)

WEST KOLKATA

Botanical Gardens

PARK

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/50, 40-min buggy-tour ₹25/150 extra; ☺5.30am-5pm) If it weren't such an awkward trek by public transport, Kolkata's lovely 109-hectare Botanical Gardens would make a great place to escape from the city's sounds and smells. Founded in 1786, the gardens played an important role in cultivating tea long before the drink became a household commodity. Today there's a **cactus house**, palm collection, river-overlook and a boating-lake with splendid Giant Amazon Lily pads. The most touted attraction is the 250-year-old **'world's largest banyan tree'**. However, the central trunk rotted away in the 1920s, leaving a disappointing array of cross-branches and linked aerial roots that have become virtual trees of their own.

The banyan is five minutes' walk from the park's **Bicentenary Gate** (Andul Rd) on bus route 55A or 25 minutes' walk from the gardens' **main gate** where bus 55 and minibus 6 terminate after a painfully slow drive from Esplanade (₹7) via Howrah. Taxis from Shakespeare Sarani charge around ₹90 via the elegant **Vidyasagar Setu** (Hooghly Suspension Bridge).

SOUTH KOLKATA

Kalighat Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

(☺5am-2pm & 4-10pm) This ancient Kali temple is Kolkata's holiest spot for Hindus and possibly the source of the city's name. Today's version, a 1809 rebuild, has floral- and peacock-motif tiles that look more Victorian than Indian. More interesting than the

DURGA PUJA

Much as Carnival transforms Rio or New Orleans, Durga Puja brings Kolkata even more colourfully to life. For five days people venerate gaudily painted idols of the 10-armed goddess Durga and her entourage displayed in *pandals* (temporary shrines) that dominate yards, block roads or fill little parks. In the last 30 years, design competitions and increasing corporate sponsorship have seen *pandals* growing ever more ornate and complex, some with topical or political messages. West Bengal Tourism tours try to take tourists around a selection of the best *pandals* but getting anywhere within the city can take hours given the general festive pandemonium. At the festival's climax, myriad Durga idols are thrown into the sacred Hooghly River amid singing, water throwing, fireworks and indescribable traffic congestion. If you just want *pandal* photos and not the festival aspect, consider visiting just after Durga Puja when the idol has gone but *pandals* have yet to be deconstructed. Or come back for Kali Puja three weeks later when the city does the whole thing all over again, this time with statues of blue-faced, red-tongued Kali. And for months to come there are many alternative pujas.

Many diaspora Bengalis return 'home' for Durga Puja so Kolkata hotels fill up. Hotels will be comparatively empty afterwards but at that stage many locals go away on holiday so getting air tickets out can be virtually impossible for a week or two (the tourist quota on train tickets can be a saviour).

architecture are the jostling pilgrim queues that snake into the main hall to fling hibiscus flowers at a crowned, three-eyed Kali image. There's no need to join them to feel the atmosphere (loitering priests that offer to whisk you to the front of the queue will expect a very hefty 'donation'). Behind the bell pavilion but still within the mandir complex, goats are ritually beheaded to honour the ever-demanding goddess, or, as a local guide described it, to buy 'God power'.

The temple is hidden in a maze of alleys jammed with market stalls selling votive flowers, brassware, religious artefacts and pictures of Kali. From Kalighat metro station (with its four-storey Mother Teresa mosaic) walk towards the putrid Tolisnala Stream where **Shanagar Burning Ghat** (Map p458) hosts an impressive gangle of monuments celebrating those cremated here. Turn north up Tollygunge Rd which becomes Kalighat Rd after one block. The temple is to the right down the footpath beside **Nirmal Hriday** (Map p458; 251 Kalighat Rd). That's Mother Teresa's world famous, if surprisingly small, home for the dying, its roof-corners pimpled with neo-Mughal mini-domes.

Further north up lively Kalighat Rd, after it curves across Hazra Rd, you'll find numerous **image makers**: less famous but almost as intriguing as those in Kumartuli (p455).

Rabindra Sarovar

PARK

(Map p458) The parkland here is less beautiful than Kolkata's Botanical Gardens but at dawn the lake prettily reflects the hazy

sunrise while middle class Kolkatans jog, row and meditate. Some form circles to do group-yoga routines culminating in ho-ho ha-ha-ha laugh-ins; these are the informal **Laughing Clubs** (☺6-7am), engagingly described by Tony Hawks in *The Weekenders: Adventures in Calcutta*. Even if forced, a good giggle can be refreshingly therapeutic.

Alipore

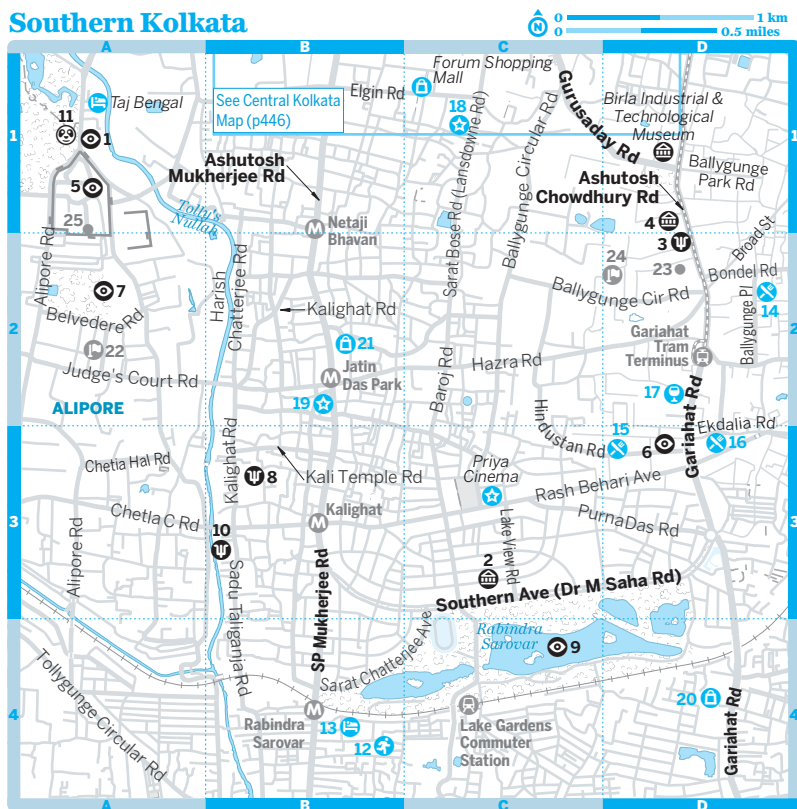
AREA

First opened in 1875, Kolkata's 16-hectare **zoo** (Map p458; Alipore Rd; admission ₹10; ☺9am-5pm Fri-Wed) includes lawns and lakeside promenades that are very popular with weekend picnickers, hence all the rubbish. Some enclosures are more confined than others but reconstruction works were underway during research both here and across the road at the sorry little **aquarium** (Map p458; admission ₹3; ☺10.30am-5pm Fri-Wed). Bus 230 from Rabindra Sadan passes outside. Directly south of the zoo entrance, the (private) access road to India's **National Library** (www.nlindia.org) loops around the very regal **Curzon Mansion** (Map p458), once the colonial Viceroy's residence. Around 1km southeast, the delightful **Horticultural Gardens** (admission ₹10; ☺6-10am & 2-7pm) offer some respite from the traffic rumble.

Gariahat

AREA

This wealthy area isn't really a tourist draw but has a good scattering of restaurants and shops. There's also the large, distinctive 20th-century **Birla Mandir** (Map p458; Gariahat Rd; ☺6-11am & 4.30-9pm).



Several Gariahat galleries feature cutting-edge contemporary Bengali art, including **Experimenter** (www.experimenter.in; 2/1 Hindustan Rd; ☎11am-7pm Mon-Sat), behind Kanishka's; **CIMA** (Map p458; www.cimaartindia.com; Sunny Towers, 2nd fl, 43 Ashutosh Chowdhury Rd; ☎11am-7pm Tue-Sat, 3-7pm Mon), a six-room gallery; **Birla Academy of Art & Culture** (Map p458; www.birlaart.com; 109 Southern Ave; ☎4-7pm Tue-Sun); and **Ganges Gallery** (Map p458; www.gangesart.net; 33A Jatin Das Rd; ☎11am-7pm Mon-Sat).



Activities

Cooking

Kali Travel Home (www.traveleastindia.com; ₹550-750) arranges personal three-hour Bengali cooking courses led by local women in their homes. Costs include food.

Golf

A major plus of sleeping at the **Tollygunge Club** (p462; www.thetollygungeclub.com; guest

weekday/weekend ₹175/350) is the right to play on their magnificent golf course.

The 1829 **Royal Calcutta Golf Club** (☎24731288; www.royalcalcuttagolfclub.com; 18 Golf Club Rd), the world's oldest outside Britain, allows foreign nonmembers to play a round for US\$50.

Volunteering

Several organisations welcome foreign volunteers with specific skills (see p41). Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity (p448) welcomes all comers.

Yoga

There are five-day courses at varying locations with **Art of Living** (www.artofliving.org; http://artoflivingindia.in/courses.asp; aolkol@vsnl.net), plus holistic and therapeutic yoga with **Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana** (Map p458; ☎24241340; www.vyasacal.org; 69K Prince Bakhtiar Shah Rd).

Southern Kolkata

Sights

- 1 Aquarium..... A1
- 2 Birla Academy of Art & Culture..... C3
- 3 Birla Mandir..... D2
- 4 CIMA..... D1
- 5 Curzon Mansion..... A1
- 6 Experimeneter D3
- 7 Horticultural Gardens A2
- 8 Kalighat Temple..... B3
- 9 Nirmal Hriday..... (see 8)
- 9 Rabrindra Sarovar C4
- 10 Shanagar Burning Ghat B3
- 11 Zoo..... A1

Activities, Courses & Tours

- 12 Vivekananda Yoga
Anusandhana Samsthana B4

Sleeping

- 13 Bodhi Tree..... B4

Eating

- 14 6 Ballygunge Place..... D2
- 15 Bhojohori Manna (Branch 6)..... D3
- 16 Bhojohori Manna (Ekdalia)..... D3

Drinking

- 17 Mirch Masala D2

Entertainment

- 18 Basement..... C1
- 19 Ginger..... B2

Shopping

- 20 Dakshinapan Shopping Centre..... D4
- 21 Seagull Bookstore..... B2

Information

- 22 German Consulate..... A2
- 23 Mizoram State Office..... D2
- 24 Myanmar Consulate D2
- 25 National Library..... A1

Tours

For excursions to the Sunderbans Tiger Reserve, see p477.

City Tours

Personal, accompanied city-walks lasting around four hours are available through expat-run **Kali Travel Home** (☎25550581, 9007778504; www.travelindia.com; ₹350-600) and youthful **CalWalks** (☎9830184030; www.calcuttawalks.com; from ₹1200). Both are enthusiastic and flexible as to the area covered and both offer a range of alternative Kolkata experiences.

Best known for their mangrove boat trips, **Backpackers** (Map p450; ☎9836177140; www.tourdesundarbans.com; Tottee Ln) also offer innovative two-part city tours on the back of a motorbike (₹1500). Tours drive past several well-known sites and add curiosities like Kolkata's giant trash-mountain, Tangra Chinatown, a burning ghat, a Shiva temple (join the prayers) and a brief drive through the red-light district. Longer car tours (₹3000 per person) visit Belur Math and Dakshineswar then continue up the Hooghly as far as Bansberia's Kremlin-styled palace temple.

West Bengal Tourism (Map p452; ☎22437260, westbengaltourism.gov.in; 3/2 BBD Bagh; ☀10.30am-1.30pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat) runs full-day sightseeing **bus tours** (₹250; ☀8.30am). They're a relative bargain but give only sweaty, drive-by

glimpses of most sights and rush you round Belur Math and Dakshineswar in barely half an hour apiece. The office opens at 7am to sell last-minute tickets. Trips might be cancelled if there are less than 10 customers (least likely on Sundays).

Sleeping

Looks can be deceptive. Some eye-catchingly smart facades mask lacklustre, mustily disappointing rooms. Other very survivable places are hidden within buildings that look like crumbling wrecks. Decent hotel accommodation in Kolkata often costs about the same as in Europe. So if you want to pay under ₹400 for a room, don't expect to enjoy the experience. Even in many midrange hotels peeling paint, loose wires, battered furniture and damp patches come as standard. Much of Kolkata's rock-bottom accommodation represents 'a whole new league of nastiness', and where we review such cheapies be aware that we're usually identifying the least objectionable options rather than making a recommendation: consider putting a mat on the bed to reduce bed-bug bites. Many cheaper hotels lock their gates by midnight.

AC hotels add 10% luxury tax (5% on cheaper rooms) and some tack on further service charges. For fairness we quote total prices. Most places charging under ₹1000 won't take bookings. Top-end places are often

very significantly discounted on websites like www.yatra.com and www.agoda.com.

SUDDER ST AREA

The nearest Kolkata gets to a backpacker ghetto is the area around Sunder St. It's the only place in town to suffer much beggar hassle and many of the buildings are decrepit but the location is brilliantly central, there's a range of traveller-oriented services and it's about the only area in Kolkata where ultra-cheap dives accept foreigners. There's also a growing scattering of higher-end options.

Oberoï Grand

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p450; ☎22492323; www.oberoïkolkata.com; 15 Chowringhee Rd; s/d/ste from ₹19,900/22,550/38,500; 🍷@🍷🍷) Passing through the almost hidden courtyard gateway, you're transported from the chaos of Chowringhee Rd into a regal oasis of genteel calm that deserves every point on its five stars. Immaculate accommodation oozes atmosphere, the swimming pool is ringed with palms and proactive staff anticipate your every need.

Ashreen Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(Map p450; ☎22520889; ashreen_guesthouse@yahoo.com; 2 Cowie Lane; d ₹495-845; 🍷) One of Kolkata's best value mini-hotels, the rooms are small but sparkling clean with sometimes-functioning geysers and many playful interior touches. There's often a waiting list. Across the road, the co-managed Afridi International is less impressive.

Fairlawn Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p450; ☎22521510; www.fairlawnhotel.com; 13A Sunder St; s/d incl breakfast ₹2721/3322; 🍷) Taking guests since 1936, the Fairlawn is a characterful 1783 Raj-era home fronted by tropical greenery. The stairs and sitting room are smothered with photos, family mementos and articles celebrating the hotel's nonagenarian owner. While not luxurious, most rooms are spacious and well equipped with re-tiled bathrooms (some old tubs remain). At least one of the cheaper downstairs rooms (s/d ₹2326/2880) has limited natural light and startling pink decor.

Bawa Walson

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p450; ☎22521512; bawawalson@bawahotels.com; 5A Sunder St; discount/full from ₹3000/5750; 🍷) Sunder Street's sexiest new addition comes with back-lit panels, luxurious box-spring mattresses, selected toiletries and flat-screen TVs. When finished there'll be a spa across the fairly lit courtyard. It's good value when discounted but at full rack

rates the lack of a lift, the limited views and a ₹500 internet charge are less forgivable.

Housez 43

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p450; ☎22276020; www.housez43.com; 43 Mirza Ghalib St; s/deluxe/luxury ₹2625/3150/4400; 🍷🍷) Bright colours, funky lamps and odd-shaped mirrors bring character to this handily central boutique hotel, though cheaper rooms are less impressive than the bold public spaces.

Sunflower Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(Map p450; ☎22299401; 5th fl, 7 Royd St; d/tr from ₹750/900; 🍷) Slightly spartan but fresh and assiduously cleaned with high ceilings and ample communal space, the Sunflower occupies much of a once-grand 1865 building that's attractive but was rated as a potential fire hazard in a 2010 *Calcutta Telegraph* article. To check in, take the 1940s lift to the top and cross the little roof garden.

Bhagirathi Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(Map p450; ☎9836993678; Sunder St; old/new d ₹650/850, tr 1300; 🍷) Entered from the same courtyard as the Super Guest House, this all-AC guesthouse can be great value if you score one of the five newer rooms with windows, new paintwork, clean tiled floors and piping hot water. Other rooms are windowless and those across the courtyard are more dated.

Lytton Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p450; ☎39841900; www.lyttonhotelindia.com; 14 Sunder St; s/d/tr/ste ₹5280/6050/6930/8030; 🍷) This solid midrange choice has a dark, slightly dated lobby but Tiffany-style panels enliven the corridors and rooms have received a gently contemporary revamp including good modern bathrooms. Room sizes vary significantly.

Hotel Aafreen

GUESTHOUSE \$

(Map p450; ☎22654146; Nawab Abdur Rahman St; d with fan/AC ₹500/750; 🍷) Offering midrange quality at budget prices, the Aafreen's paintwork is mostly intact, staff are obliging and freshly tiled bathrooms have hot water. The lift is temperamental.

Aafreen Tower

GUESTHOUSE \$

(Map p450; ☎22293280; www.aafreentower.com; 9A Kyd St; d with fan/AC ₹600/990; 🍷) The glass elevator creates a little and the bright orange-and-gold corridors are being patched up, but if repairs are fully followed through, this should once again be a recommended choice.

Hotel Galaxy

GUESTHOUSE \$

(Map p450; Stuart Lane; r with fan/AC ₹500/800; ☹) This ageing mansion-block has had its high-ceilinged rooms well upgraded with shiny floor tiles and hot water in the sizeable bathroom, at least those we saw. Bookings aren't possible and guests tend to stay a while.

The Corporate

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p450; ☎22267551; www.thecorporatekolkata.com; 4 Royd St; r from ₹4400; ☹) In this capable cube of stone and glass, the cheaper rooms are sometimes bigger than ₹4950 'executive' ones. Wi-fi is 'being installed'.

Hotel Pioneer International

GUESTHOUSE \$

(Map p450; 1st fl, 1 Marquis St; d without/with AC ₹400/600) Wobbly wooden stairs within an unpromisingly aged house lead to six unexpectedly neat rooms with new tiled floors and multilingual TV. Staff are friendly and helpful.

Hotel VIP InterContinental

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(Map p450; ☎22520150; vipintercontinental@rediffmail.com; 44 Mirza Ghalib St; s/d from ₹1120/1575, super-deluxe r ₹2310; ☹☹) Behind the one-desk reception, friendly VIP InterContinental has a selection of small to very small rooms but all are well air-conditioned, carefully maintained, have hot water and stone or tiled floors. Don't confuse it with the nearby Hotel VIP Continental whose dashing foyer hides sorry corridors and pricey modern rooms spoil by sickening wall-stains.

Timestar Hotel

GUESTHOUSE \$

(Map p450; ☎22528028; 2 Tottie Lane; s/d/tr from ₹250/350/475, d with AC ₹750) This chunky-walled colonial-era mansion has tatty elements but well-tiled floors and high enough ceilings in the upstairs rooms that they don't overheat too badly. Two rooms now have air-conditioning, repainted walls and decent bathrooms.

Paragon Hotel

BACKPACKER DIVE \$

(Map p450; 2 Stuart Lane; dm ₹120, s/d without bathroom from ₹200/270, d with shower ₹350) Some of the coffin-box rooms are so spirit-crushing that the graffiti is actually an improvement. However, a few battered chairs on the rooftop create a great place to hang out with fellow backpackers and staff are friendlier here than at the essentially similar Hotel Maria next door. Bring your own padlock.

Modern Lodge

BACKPACKER DIVE \$

(Map p450; 1 Stuart Lane; s ₹100-150, d ₹200-300) It isn't modern at all but Modern

Lodge has a more homely feel than most other ultra-budget dives, with an idiosyncratic courtyard, 1st-floor sitting room, old teak doors and peaceful roof terrace. But the bed-spaces are as ragged as ever; many are haphazardly subdivided and without power-points. Management seems erratic.

Hotel Pushpak

GUESTHOUSE, HOSTEL \$

(Map p450; ☎22265841; www.hotelpushpakinternational.com; 10 Kyd St; dm/s/d ₹300/1260/1470; ☹) Ocean-liner corridors lead to rooms that are mostly lacklustre and a little worn but an interesting feature here is the new 28-bed AC dorm, each bunk with lockers above and beneath (some already broken), lamp, fan and curtains for minimal privacy. Shared bathrooms include geyser showers.

Centrepont Guest House

BACKPACKER DIVE \$

(Map p450; ☎22520953; ian_rashid@yahoo.com; 20 Mirza Ghalib St; dm ₹100, s/d from ₹400/450; ☹) Fan rooms are bare-bones boxes with toilets tucked in what appears to be a cupboard. AC rooms are larger but no lovelier. Three large 4th-floor bunk-dorms are nominally sex-segregated, have under-bed safe-boxes (bring a padlock) with shared showers and toilets on the open terrace. Stairs seem dangerously half-collapsed and some mattresses have proved itchy.

CITY CENTRE**Chrome**

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$

(Map p446; ☎30963096; www.chromehotel.in; 226 AJC Bose Rd; s/d from ₹8800/9350; ☹☹) Sleep in a brilliantly executed artistic statement that looks like a seven-storey Swiss cheese by day and a colour-pulsing alien communicator by night. Rooms have optical illusion decor, the 5th-floor landing hides a mini-library and a rooftop pool is under construction. Bleeping music masks traffic noise.

Park Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p450; ☎22499000; www.theparkhotels.com; 17 Park St; s/d from ₹13,200/15,400; ☹@☹☹) Perfectly central and hosting much of the city's nightlife, two of the Park's pricier floors use very stylish black-on-black decor while 'Residency' floors go for a more classical feel. Annoyances include reverberating music on the lower floors that can disturb light sleepers and a front desk where staff seem constantly over-stretched. The small, colourfully stylish foyer entrance is accessed bizarrely by walking through a cafe-deli.

Allenby Inn

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(Map p446; ☎24869984; allenbyinn@vsnl.net; 1/2 Allenby Rd; r ₹3300; 🏠📞) With fashionable trimmings and lashings of abstract art, some of the 20 rooms are very large, though towels could be softer and mattresses thicker. Two 5th-floor rooms share a dining area and small kitchen.

Golden Park

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p446; ☎22883939; www.thegoldenpark.com; 13 Ho Chi Minh Sarani; s/d ₹8800/9900, discount rate ₹5500/6500; 🏠) The Golden Park is very fair value by central Kolkata standards with typical business-hotel amenities in the regularly upgraded if modestly sized rooms. The eccentric four-storey lobby-atrium features oddly mismatched nymphs, wood paneling, glass elevators and a vast Shakespeare-versus-Zoroaster relief.

Hotel Aston

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p446; ☎24863145; hotelaston@gmail.com; 3 Aston Rd; s/d ₹1495/1610; 🏠📞) Compact but attractive all-AC rooms with marble floors and decor that's far better than most Kolkata options at this price level. It's just off Sarat Bose Rd near the Laxmi Narayan Mandir.

Kenilworth

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p446; ☎22823939; www.kenilworthhotels.com/kolkata; 1 Little Russell St; s/d/ste ₹9900/11,000/17,600; 🏠) The deep lobby of marble, dark wood and chandeliers contrasts successfully with a more contemporary cafe that spills out onto an attractive lawn. Pleasing, fully equipped rooms have thick mattresses, restrained sunny colour schemes and large mirrors. Discount rates from ₹7000 are often available. Five suites lead off an impressive landing in an old mansion opposite but don't quite pull off the full 'heritage' effect.

Astor

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p446; ☎22829950; www.astorkolkata.com; 15 Shakespeare Sarani; s/d from ₹4725/6600; 🏠) Artful evening floodlighting brings out the best of the Astor's solid 1905 architecture, while some floors are quaintly uneven and stairways have original wrought-iron banisters. But while some rooms have attractive three-colour woodwork, the floral bedspreads maintain that nursing-home feel. A few singles are windowless. Look for discount deals.

BBD BAGH AREA

There's no traveller scene here but the following options are handy for Chandni Chowk metro and fair value by Kolkata standards.

Esplanade Chambers

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(Map p452; ☎22127101; www.esplanadechambers.com; 2 Chandni Chowk St; s/d/ste with fan ₹700/900/1000, with AC ₹900/1500/1800; 🏠📞) These two floors of former apartments are more homestay than hotel. Rooms vary wildly from unadorned claustrophobic singles to comfortable 'executive' mini-suites complete with ornaments, wooden bed-frames and even a circular bathtub in the best room. There are a few minor cleaning issues but prices include wi-fi (best downstairs), breakfast, hot water and toiletries. Access is via a narrow alley beside Gypsy Restaurant.

Bengal Buddhist Association

GUESTHOUSE \$

(Map p452; Baudha Dharmankur Sabha; ☎22117138; http://bengalbuddhist.com/guest-house.html; bds1892@yahoo.com; Buddhist Temple Rd; tw from ₹250; 🏠) Although intended for Buddhist students, anyone can rent these simple rooms which have plenty of cobwebs without being unduly dirty. Shared bathrooms are basic but have geysers. Three rooms have AC, two with private bathrooms. The courtyard location is quiet; gates are locked from 10.30pm to 5am.

Broadway Hotel

HOTEL \$

(Map p452; ☎22363930; www.broadwayhotel.in; 27A Ganesh Chandra Ave; s/d/tr/ste ₹580/625/925/1125, without bathroom s/d ₹480/565) This simple but well-maintained old hotel has an antiquated lift, '50s furniture and classic bar downstairs. Most rooms are generously large with high ceilings, and corner rooms offer plenty of light. The free newspaper under the door is a nice touch. It's clean and great value but noisy and showers are cold.

OUTER KOLKATA

Due to distant locations and lack of convenient transport links, we don't review several of the city's top business hotels including the impressive **Hyatt Regency** (http://kolkata.regency.hyatt.com), eco-friendly **Sonar** (www.itcwelcomgroup.in/hotels/itcsonar.aspx) and the antique-softened 1990s **Taj Bengal** (www.tajhotels.com).

TOP CHOICE Tollygunge Club

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎24732316; www.thetollygungeclub.org; d/cottage/ste ₹4412/4743/5074; 🏠🏠🏠) The Tolly's idyllic setting with mature tropical trees, roosting birds and velvet-smooth golf greens creates a mind-boggling contrast to the deafening chaos of surrounding Kolkata. All guest rooms are sparkling clean but while

some have functional motel-style decor, others have been very stylishly revamped to the standards of a boutique hotel. Guests get temporary membership allowing access to all club sports and entertainment facilities including otherwise exclusive colonial-era bar-cafes and (except Monday) the wonderful golf course. It's a 10-minute walk from Tollygunge metro. Book ahead.

Bodhi Tree

GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$

(Map p458; ☎24243871, 24246534; www.bodhi-treekolkata.com; 48/44 Swiss Park; r incl breakfast ₹2200-4000; 🍷🍷) Well-travelled owners dub Bodhi Tree's intriguing little **gallery-cafe** (☎2pm-7pm Tue-Sun) a 'monastery of art'. Above, five uniquely characterful Buddha-themed rooms come with stone walls and decent facilities. Bathrooms aren't as memorable and the cheapest room is pretty cramped but the suburban location is under 10 minutes' stroll from Rabrindra Sarovar metro (walk east from behind the southeast exit and keep going).

AIRPORT AREA

An accommodation booth in the airport's domestic terminal lists numerous 'airport area' hotels but most decent options are over 2km away down VIP Rd. There is a selection of cheaper places (fan/AC from ₹350/750) on Jessore Rd between Airport Gates 1 and 2 and in the side lanes behind. However, virtually all of the latter seem overpriced and grimy while rooms facing Jessore Rd suffer particularly serious street noise. Of the dozen that we checked, none could be wholeheartedly recommended. Better than most, if slightly past its prime, is **White Palace** (☎25117402; 28/1 Italgacha Rd; s ₹1100-1430, d ₹1210-1650; 🍷), facing Om Lodge (on the street that leads off Jessore Rd nearly opposite the Bharat Petrol Station, close to Airport Gate 1).



Eating

Most restaurants add 12.5% tax to bills. A few posher places add further 'service charges'. Tips are welcome at cheaper places and expected at most expensive restaurants. The *Times Food Guide* (www.timescity.com/kolkata; ₹100) offers hundreds of restaurant reviews. Don't miss sampling Bengali cuisine. At its best it's a wonderful discovery with a whole new vocabulary of names and flavours. In cheaper Bengali places, portions are often tapas-sized so order two or three dishes along with rice/luchi and sweet *khejur* (chutney).

UPPER CHOWRINGHEE AREA

A few basic traveller cafes around Sudder St serve backpacker favourites like banana pancakes, muesli and toasted sandwiches complemented by fresh fruit juices and a range of good-value Indian dishes. Eateries across Mirza Ghalib St cater predominantly to Bangladeshi tastes. Cheap places for Indian-regional food lie around Hogg Market with many more food stalls lining Madge Lane, Bertram St, and Humayan Pl where fast food chains join vendors of dosas, chow mein and fresh juices. For more upmarket fare try Jong's, the hotel restaurants at the Oberoi and Peerless Inn or walk ten minutes south to Park Street where you'll find many of Kolkata's age-old family favourites facing off with KFC and a beef-free McDonald's.

AROUND SUDDER ST

Raj's Spanish Cafe

CAFE \$

(Map p450; Taberna Vasca; off Sudder St; mains ₹25-150; ☎7.30am-10pm; 🍷) Excellent coffee, juices, pancakes and ₹25 wi-fi (plenty of power-points too) makes this a great traveller cafe hang-out. The menu includes a small but very well made selection of Spanish dishes (tortilla, *pisto manchego*) and delicious pesto-pasta (₹90). Decor is simple but welcoming with a cushioned sitting space and a small outdoor area.

Sidheshwari Ashram

BENGALI \$

(Map p450; 19 Rani Rashmoni Rd; mains ₹3-70, ☎9am-4pm & 7pm-11pm) In this old-fashioned eating house, walls are a little grubby, little English is spoken and if you come around noon you'll have to fight for one of the old stone-topped tables. But in return you'll get truly excellent Bengali food at bargain local prices. Ideally bring a local friend to help you choose. It's not far from Sudder St but easily missed set back between shops then up an unlikely stairway. *Khub bhalo!*

Jong's/Zaranj

EAST ASIAN, INDIAN \$\$\$

(Map p450; ☎22490369; Sudder St; mains ₹400-840; ☎12.30-3pm & 7.30-11pm Wed-Mon) Two suave if pricey restaurants in one. Jong's serves Chinese, under-spiced Thai and other Asian cuisines in a magnificently wood-panelled room that feels like a Raj-oriental gentleman's club. Smart-casual Zaranj has a more modern vibe and takes the taste-buds on a gourmet tour of India. Some meals include rice but with most it's ₹100 extra.

Blue & Beyond

MULTICUISINE \$\$\$

(Map p450; 9th fl, Lindsay Hotel, Lindsay St; mains ₹120-190; ☎11am-11pm) The open-air rooftop

terrace offers views over New Market and there's a well air-conditioned dining room in case rain or excessive heat make sitting there impractical. A wide-ranging menu encompasses Bengali fish dishes, Irish stew and ratatouille at prices that are very reasonable for a restaurant that's licensed to serve alcohol.

Blue Sky Cafe

CAFE \$

(Map p450; Chowringhee Lane; snacks ₹22-60, mains ₹50-195; ☉6.30am-10.30pm) A vast selection of reliable traveller standbys served in an almost stylish setting with high-backed zinc chairs at long glass tables. Tiny, unadorned **Fresh & Juicy** across the road is arguably even better value but gets sweaty with just five cramped tables.

Super Chicken

TRAVELLER CAFE \$

(Map p450; Sudder St; mains ₹40-100; ☉8.30am-11.30pm) Succulent tandoori tops off a decent menu of tempting backpacker faves in this small but bright, well air-conditioned room.

Prince

BENGALI \$

(Map p450; 17 Mirza Ghalib St; dishes ₹12-120; ☉7.30am-11pm) Air-conditioned place for eat-with-hands, unpretentious Bengali food aimed primarily at the area's Bangladeshi visitors. Two doors away, **Radhuni** is very similar. Both are neater but less satisfying than Sidheshwari Ashram.

Aminia

MUGHLAI \$

(Map p450; Hogg St; mains ₹50-84; ☉10.30am-10.30pm) Ceiling fans whirr above this brightly lit cacophonous classic where decor is vaguely art deco, service is rapid and local women dine unchaperoned. For better biryanis you might prefer Arsalan or Shiraz.

Hotel Mastan

INDIAN \$

(Map p450; Unit H6, 37 Hogg Market; mains ₹7-35; ☉6am-11.30pm) Craving beef on a budget? Dare yourself to visit the 'pious man', barely changed since 1941. The soot-darkened interior looks seriously off-putting but for four generations the Sufi-inspired Haider family have been serving up cheap yet fresh meals including bhuna curried beef (₹32 with rice).

Kathleen Confectioners

BAKERY \$

(Map p450; 12 Mirza Ghalib St; snacks ₹12-35; ☉9am-10pm) Their sickly sweet cakes aren't exactly the promised 'Taste of Hapinezz' but savoury pastries are delicious. Numerous alternative branches.

PARK ST AREA

Fire and Ice

ITALIAN \$\$\$

(Map p446; ☎22884073; www.fireandicepizzeria.com; Kanak Bldg, Middleton St; mains ₹290-550, ☉noon-11.15pm) Self-consciously handsome wait-staff sporting black shirts and bandannas bring forth real Italian pastas, and pizzas whose fresh-baked thin crusts are Kolkata's best.

Arsalan

MUGHLAI \$\$

(Map p450; 119A Ripon St; mains ₹95-205; ☉noon-11.30pm) The decor is striking and contemporary without being upmarket. The high ceilings with gilt insets contrast with plain tables at which the main attractions are melt-in-mouth chicken tikka and celebrated biryanis that come with a free palette of extras (lemon, chilli, onion, mint chutney).

Teej

RAJASTHANI \$\$\$

(Map p450; ☎22170730; www.teej.in; 1st fl, 2 Russell St; mains ₹145-255, thalis ₹338-450; ☉noon-3.30pm & 7-10.30pm) Superbly painted with Mughal-style murals, the interior feels like an ornate Rajasthani *haveli* (traditional residence) and the excellent, 100% vegetarian food is predominantly Rajasthani, too. Downstairs, much cheaper if stylistically neutral **Gangaur** serves dosas and ₹124 thalis in AC comfort.

Shiraz

MUGHLAI \$\$

(Map p446; 135 Park St; mains ₹75-125; ☉5am-11.30pm) Synonymous with Kolkata biriyani, the Shiraz also offers a range of curries and a mutton *chaap* (rib-meat dish) of rare subtlety and succulence. The location is handy if you're visiting South Park St Cemetery.

Peter Cat

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Map p450; Middleton Row; mains ₹116-200; ☉11am-11.15pm) This phenomenally popular Kolkata institution offers fizzing sizzlers, great *chelo*-kebabs (barbecued ground lamb) and beers in pewter tankards. Waiters wear Rajasthani costumes in an atmosphere redolent of a mood-lit 1970s steakhouse. Reservations aren't accepted; queues are often long but sociable. Across Park St, **Mocambo** is similarly dated yet ever-popular.

Bar-B-Q

INDIAN, CHINESE \$\$

(Map p450; 1st fl, 43 Park St; mains ₹130-208; ☉noon-4.30pm & 7-11.15pm) Three interconnected dining rooms offer different but similar menus in this enduring family favourite that features sloping ceilings held on polished wooden pillars, buzzing conversation and an ever-witty maître d'.

Marco Polo

MULTICUISINE \$\$\$

(Map p450; ☎22273939; 24 Park St; mains ₹250-475; ☎1.30-11pm) Stylish and moodily under-lit, this split-level restaurant takes diners on a culinary world tour from Bengal to Italy via Goa, China and Lebanon.

CITY CENTRE

As well as the places reviewed there are dining options scattered around Camac St, Shakespeare Sarani and in the Forum Mall (Elgin St), plus three cheap Tibetan eateries at **Momo corner** (cnr Suburban Hospital Rd & Chowringhee Rd).

Kewpies

BENGALI \$\$

(Map p446; ☎24861600; 2 Elgin Lane; most dishes ₹73-175, thalis ₹250-540; ☎12.30-3pm & 7.30-11pm Tue-Sun) Dining at Kewpies feels like being invited to a dinner party in the chef's eclectic, gently old-fashioned home (avoid the charmless annex-room, via the north door). First-rate Bengali food comes in small but fairly priced portions. Minimum spend is ₹250 per person.

Oh! Calcutta

BENGALI \$\$\$

(Map p446; ☎22837161; 4th fl, Forum Mall, Elgin Rd; mains ₹280-460; ☎12.30-3pm & 7.30-11pm) Shutter-edged mirror 'windows', bookshelves and B&W photography create a casually up-market atmosphere in this suave if pricey Bengali-fusion restaurant. *Luchi* (₹102 for six) are feather-light, and fresh lime brings out the subtleties of *koraishtir dhokar dalna* (pea-cakes in ginger, ₹312).

Drive Inn

MULTICUISINE \$

(Map p446; 10 Middleton St; mains ₹46-82; ☎10.30am-10pm) Sandwiches, *thukpa* (Tibetan noodle-soup), curries and pizza served in a modest open-air 'garden' with simple fan-pavilion tables, mosaic backdrops and a trio of metal musicians fashioned from scrap metal and bicycle chains. Good value thalis (from ₹75) available except Sundays. No meat.

Mainland China

CHINESE \$\$\$

(Map p446; ☎22837964; www.mainlandchinaindia.com/contact_kolkata.html; 3A Gurusaday Rd; mains

₹375-590; ☎12.30-3.30pm & 7.30-11.30pm)

Consistent, upmarket Chinese food in sophisticated surroundings. Reservations advised. Lunch buffet weekday/weekend ₹482/590.

Kookie Jar

BAKERY \$

(Map p446; Rowden St; pastries ₹20-60; ☎8am-10pm) Kolkata's most heavenly cakes and fudge brownies (₹40) along with multi-grain bread (₹50) and various wraps and fluffy pastries. Take-away only.

Haldiram

FAST FOOD \$

(Map p446; 58 Chowringhee Rd; ☎8am-10pm) Chain eatery with great value pay-then-queue vegetarian thalis (₹70), dosas (from ₹36), burgers (₹32) and Bengali sweets.

Jalapenos

MEXICAN \$\$

(Map p446; ☎22820204; 10 Wood St; mains ₹85-250; ☎11.30am-10.15pm; ☎) High-ceilinged with mock wooden beams and little spice-bottle alcoves, their 'Mexican' dishes are enjoyable albeit almost unrecognisable.

BBD BAGH AREA**Song Hay**

CHINESE \$

(Map p452; ☎22480974; 3 Waterloo St; lunches ₹25-75, dinner mains ₹50-110; ☎11am-10.30pm) This modest but prize-winning restaurant cooks authentic Chinese food at prices that are especially reasonable before 5pm when half-priced, half-size portions are available.

Amber/Essence

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Map p452; ☎22483477; 2nd fl, 11 Waterloo St; mains ₹130-350; ☎1.30-11pm) This pleasantly semi-trendy middle-class restaurant has back-lit panels and triangular lamp niches but music can get a little oppressive at night and their signature brain masala isn't to everyone's taste. Another branch on Middleton Row.

Anand

SOUTH INDIAN \$

(Map p452; ☎22128344; 19 CR Ave; dosas ₹32-86; ☎9am-9.30pm, closed Wed) Prize-winning pure-veg dosas served in a well-kept if

DON'T MISS**KATI ROLLS**

Bengal's trademark fast food is the kati roll: take a *paratha* roti, fry it with a coating of egg then fill with sliced onions, chilli and your choice of stuffing (curried chicken, grilled meat or paneer). Roll it up in a twist of paper and it's ready to eat, generally on the street from hole-in-the-wall serveries. Standards vary considerably but a classic is **Hot Kati Rolls** (Map p450; 1/1 Park St; rolls ₹13-60; ☎11am-10.30pm).

old-fashioned family restaurant with bamboo and mirror-tiled ceilings.

KC Das

SWEETS \$

(Map p452; Lenin Sarani; sweets ₹3-16; ☎7.30am-9.30pm) Though visually uninteresting, this historic Bengali sweet shop claims to have invented *rasgulla* (rosewater-scented cheese balls) in 1868. Basic seating available.

GARIAHAT AREA

Bhojohari Manna

BENGALI \$

(www.bhojohorimana.org; Branch 6 Map p458; ☎24663941; 18/1 Hindustan Rd; dishes ₹45-210; ☎noon-10pm; Ekdalia Map p458; 9/18 Ekdalia Rd; dishes ₹20-190; ☎noon-10pm) One of Kolkata's best respected chains for genuine if pre-prepared Bengali food, this is a fine place to try coconut-tempered *chingri malaikari* (₹145), a dish where the prawns are so big they speak lobster. The tiny original Ekdalia branch is jam-packed and basic, the only decor being sketches by the father of celebrated film director Satyajit Ray. The food is the same (but with more choice and higher prices) at the bigger, more inviting Branch 6 where the walls are adorned with a variety of musical instruments. A much more central branch very near KC Das is unpleasantly claustrophobic.

6 Ballygunge Place

BENGALI \$\$

(Map p458; ☎24603922; 6 Ballygunge Pl; mains ₹85-205; ☎12.30-3.30pm & 7-10.30pm) In a sturdy but not overly formal century-old mansion, lunchtime buffets (₹366) allow a good all-round introduction to Bengali food with five main courses plus chutneys, rice and desserts. Minibus I18 from Jatin Das Park metro stops a block north on Bondel Rd.



Drinking

Most better bars are in hotels or restaurants. Cheaper places are usually dingy and overwhelmingly male-dominated with a penchant for over-loud music, often sung by scantily clad females. Plentiful branches of Starbuck-style chains **Barista** and **Café Coffee Day** (most appealingly on Wood St) make air-conditioned oases in which to sip a decent Americano, though coffee prices can vary substantially by location. A Kolkata delight is making street-side tea stops for ₹2 minicuppas served in disposable *bhaar* (environmentally friendly earthenware thimbles).

CHOWRINGHEE AREA

Anglo pubs **Big Ben** (Map p446; Kenilworth Hotel, 1 Little Russell St) and **Someplace Else**

(Map p450; Park Hotel, 17 Park St) showcase local bands, predominantly rock oriented, without a cover charge. There are several other lively bars in and around the Park Hotel.

Fairlawn Hotel

BAR

(Map p450; 13A Sudder St; beers ₹110; ☎10am-10pm) Half woodland, half Santa-grotto, the small tropical garden of the historic Fairlawn Hotel is strung with fairy lights and plastic fruit. It's great for a cold brew but doesn't serve cocktails.

Urban Desi

BAR

(Map p446; 9th fl, 6 Camac St; small beers ₹95; ☎noon-11pm, cover charge ₹200 after 4pm) Low-key rooftop party lounge with shisha pipes to smoke, pool and table football to play and sofa seating. Admire the city panorama to trancey music that pulsates louder as the night wears on. There's also a restaurant section with great silhouette views of Victoria Memorial.

Café Thé

CAFE

(Map p446; ICCR Bldg, 9A Ho Chi Minh Sarani; teas ₹30-75, snacks ₹40-160; ☎10am-9pm) Tea house with bold, abstract-floral designs serving around 30 different teas including a mellow coconut-based Thai chai. No coffee or booze.

Flury's

CAFE

(Map p450; www.flurysindia.com; Park St; coffees ₹80-150; ☎7.30am-9.45pm) This enticing art deco palace is the classic place to nurse a good espresso or an iced-tea that comes layered like a tequila sunrise. The food is less reliable.

Ashalayam

CAFE

(www.ashalayam.org; 1st fl, 44 Mirza Ghalib St; coffee ₹6-15; ☎10.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-4pm Sat) Play chess at low wicker tables while sipping cheap machine-frothed Nescafe in this calm, bright charity craft-shop.

Roxy

BAR

(Map p450; Park Hotel, 17 Park St; small beers ₹175; ☎from 6pm) *Clockwork Orange* retro-futuristic atmosphere.

BBD BAGH AREA

Broadway Bar

BAR

(Map p452; Broadway Hotel, 27A Ganesh Chandra Ave; small/standard beer ₹45/88; ☎11am-10.30pm) Back-street Paris? Chicago 1930s? Prague 1980s? This cavernous, unpretentious old-men's pub defies easy parallels but has a compulsive left-bank fascination with cheap booze, 20 ceiling fans, grimy walls, marble floors and, thankfully, no music.

Rocks

LIVE MUSIC

(Map p452; 9 Waterloo St; beer from ₹120; ☎2pm-midnight) Three floors, three different sets of Bengali musical performers, but while some of the musicians are proficient, others sound like karaoke singers and all is played out at ear-splitting volume.

Floatel

BAR, RESTAURANT

(off Map p452; www.floatelhotel.com; Strand Rd; small/large beer ₹100/200; ☎bar 11am-10.30pm) Wide river views are best before sunset but drinks are pricey whether in the third-floor restaurant or water-level Anchor Tavern (from 3pm).

SOUTHERN KOLKATA**Mirch Masala**

BAR, RESTAURANT

(Map p458; Monoronjan Roy Sarani; beers/cocktail ₹110/115; ☎noon-11pm) Old clocks, fake trees, half a taxi chassis and a North Indian menu presented like a gossip magazine combine to create an amusing ambience that feels like a Bollywood Tex-Mex joint. Take the lane beside Pantaloons department store and continue beyond Mirch Masala's Chinese Restaurant. Kitchen closed 3pm to 7pm.

★ Entertainment

Events and cultural happenings are announced in the *Telegraph* newspaper's Metro section and the various listings brochures.

Nightclubs

On Kolkata's party nights (Wednesday, Friday and Saturday) clubs open till 2am or later. On other nights most are half empty and close at midnight. Note the difference between entry charge and cover charge: the latter can be recouped in drinks or food to the same value. Either is charged *per couple*. Women can sometimes enter free but single men (known as stags) are generally excluded and, except at Ginger, if admitted aren't expected to dance without a female partner.

Basement

NIGHTCLUB

(Map p458; Samilton Hotel, 25 Lansdowne Rd; small beers ₹100; live music Wed-Fri) Scoot beneath the scooter to enter this cramped but convivial venue for DJ sets and live bands, with low ceilings, barrel tables and relatively cheap drinks.

Underground

NIGHTCLUB

(Map p446; HHI Hotel, AJC Bose Rd; cover ₹500, small beers ₹220) Small dance floor in a pub-bar with Hard Rock Café-style elements.

Tantra

NIGHTCLUB

(Map p450; Park Hotel, 17 Park St; entry ₹500-1000, small beers ₹200) Often considered Kolkata's top club, contemporary sounds throb through the single dance floor and not-so-chilled chill-out zone around a central-island bar with an overhead observation bridge.

Venom

NIGHTCLUB

(Map p446; 8th fl, Fort Knox, 6 Camac St; cover charge ₹500-1000 Sat, small beers ₹175; ☎closed Tue) Oscillating bars of vertical red light makes it feel like you're dancing in a giant 1970s amplifier. Musical styles vary.

Ginger

NIGHTCLUB

(Map p458; 104 SP Mukherjee Rd; cover ₹500, small beers ₹190; ☎8pm-2am Fri-Sun; 📍Jatin Das Park) A majority male clientele whoop to 1990s dance hits, 'stags' are admitted and it's modestly gay friendly.

Hops

NIGHTCLUB

(2nd fl, South City Mall; small beers ₹170; ☎DJs 8pm-midnight) This relatively suave lounge-restaurant goes disco from 8pm with a dance floor beneath a stylised cave of wooden layers. No cover, 'stags' allowed (for now).

Cultural Programs**Nandan Complex**

CULTURAL CENTRE

(Map p446; 1/1A AJC Bose Rd) Comprises theatre halls **Rabindra Sadan** (☎22239936) and **Sisir Mancha** (☎22235317), plus the art-house **Nandan Cinema** (☎22231210).

ICCR

CULTURAL CENTRE

(Map p446; ☎22872680; www.iccrindia.org; 9A Ho Chi Minh Sarani) State-of-the-art new cultural centre hosting exhibitions and interesting, if sporadic, dance shows and recitals that are often free but rarely well publicised.

Cinema**Inox Elgin Rd**

CINEMA

(Map p446; www.inoxmovies.com; Forum Shopping Mall, 10/3 Elgin Rd; tickets ₹110-260) One of several modern multiplex cinemas, bookable online.

Pool/Snooker**BQ's Snooker**

SNOOKER

(Map p450; off Mirza Ghalib St; pool/snooker ₹30/60; ☎10am-10pm) Four-table hall hidden at the rear of the Anihant Building.

Spectator Sports

Even if you don't know Ganguly from a googly, the electric atmosphere of a cricket

match at **Ranji Stadium** (Map p452; Eden Gardens) is an unforgettable experience. For IPL fixtures see www.kkr.in.

At **Maidan racecourse** (📍22291104; www.rctonline.com; Acharya Jagdish Rd; admission from ₹15; 🕒36), you can watch some of India's best horse racing from 19th-century grandstands, with the Victoria Memorial providing a beautiful backdrop. Over 40 annual meets.



Shopping

Books

Several small traveller-oriented bookstalls huddle around the junction of Sudder St and Mirza Ghalib St (Map p450). For more choice visit the following.

Classic Books/Earthcare Books BOOKSHOP
(Map p446; www.earthcarebooks.com; 10 Middleton St; 🕒11am-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun)
Family publisher-bookshop.

Crossword BOOKSHOP
(Map p446; www.crosswordbookstores.com; 8 Elgin Rd; 🕒10.30am-8.30pm) Three-storey chain bookshop with cafe.

Oxford Bookstore BOOKSHOP
(Map p450; www.oxfordbookstore.com; 17 Park St; 🕒9.45am-10pm) Excellent full-range bookshop with browse-seating and cafe.

Seagull Bookstore BOOKSHOP
(Map p458; www.seagullindia.com; 31A SP Mukherjee Rd; 🕒10.30am-7.30pm) Academic bookshop with strengths in humanities, regional politics and social sciences.

Clothing

Kolkata is great value for clothing, with pre-cut shirts costing under ₹100 from the Chowringhee Rd **Hawkers' Market** (Map p450). **Local tailors** (Map p450) on Elliot Rd are less tourist-oriented than those around New Market. Fashion-conscious locals head to Hazra Rd and Gariahat.

Crafts & Souvenirs

State-government emporia sell good-quality souvenirs at decent fixed prices, while several charity cooperatives allow you to feel good about your purchases.

GOVERNMENT EMPORIA

Dakshinapan Shopping Centre

SHOPPING CENTRE
(Map p458; Gariahat Rd; 🕒10.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) It's worth facing the soul-crushing 1970s architecture for Dakshinapan's wide range of government emporia. There's

plenty of tack but many shops offer excellent-value souvenirs, crafts and fabrics. **Kashmir Emporium** (Shop F38) has colourful papier mâché boxes from ₹45, **NEHDC** (F22) has interesting tribal crafts and ₹80 wind-flutes, **Purbasha Tripura** (F4) has bargain caneware from intricate lampshades to Marx and Lenin portraits. On the lower level don't miss **Dolly's Tea Shop** (G62; teas ₹25-50, snacks ₹23-90) where teak-panels, rattan chairs, tea-crate tables and the regal presence of matriarch Dolly create a charming little oasis that attracts a wonderfully eclectic clientele.

Pragjyotika HANDICRAFTS
(Map p446; Assam House, 8 Russell St; 🕒10.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-2.30pm Sat)
Cane vases, jute handbags, pearls, fabrics and Assam tea.

Manjusha HANDICRAFTS
(Map p446; 4 Camac St; 🕒10.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) Limited choice of West Bengal handicrafts and fabrics.

CHARITY COOPERATIVES

Ankur Kala SOUVENIRS
(Map p446; www.ankurkala.org; 3 Meher Ali Rd; 🕒10am-5pm) This cooperative training-centre empowers women from the slums. The small shop sells batik, embroidered goods, greeting cards and leathersgoods.

Nagaland Emporium SOUVENIRS
(Map p446; 11 Shakespeare Sarani; 🕒10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Naga crafts including shawls and face necklaces for wannabe head-hunters.

Ashalayam HANDICRAFTS
(Map p450; www.ashalayam.org; 1st fl, 44 Mirza Ghalib St; 🕒10.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-4pm Sat) Buying cards, handmade paper and fabrics funds the (ex)street kids who made them.

Karmyog HANDICRAFTS
(Map p450; www.karmayog.org; 12B Russell St; 🕒10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Elegant gallery of paper products.

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 (off Map p452). For sitars (from ₹4000) or violins (from ₹2000) visit **Mondal & Sons** (Map p452; 8 Rabindra Sarani; 🕒10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat). Family-run since the

1850s, Mondal & Sons has counted Yehudi Menuhin among its satisfied customers.

i Information

Internet Access

Cyber Zoom (27B Park St; per hr ₹15; ☎9am-11pm)

E-Merge (iWay) (59B Park St; per hr ₹30; ☎10.30am-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-9.30pm Sun) Dated booths but good AC and fast connection.

Gorukh (7 Sudder St; per hr ₹20; ☎8.30am-10.30pm) At the back of a fabric shop with new flatscreens, pleasant owners and fingerprint security.

Medical

For listings of medical services see www.kolkatainformation.com/diagnostic.html and www.calcuttaweb.com/doctor.php.

Eastern Diagnostics (Map p450; 135 Mirza Ghalib St; ☎7.30am-8.30pm) Doctors' consultations cost ₹200. Handy for Sudder St.

Money

ATMs are widespread. Many private money-changers around Sudder St offer commission-free exchange rates several per cent better than banks and some will exchange travellers cheques. Rates are often better around the corner in Mirza Ghalib St. Shop around and double-check the maths. At the airport be aware that moneychangers charge up to 5% tax/commission.

Globe Forex (Map p446; 11 Ho Chi Minh Sarani; ☎9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2.30pm Sat) City-centre exchange with unusually good rates for cash and travellers cheques.

Permits

For any permit bring your passport, passport photographs and photocopies of your passport identity page and Indian visa.

FOREIGNERS' REGISTRATION OFFICE (FRO; Map p446; ☎22837034; 237 AJC Bose Rd; ☎11am-5pm Mon-Fri) Issues limited permits for Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh (but not Tawang) and Nagaland (Mon and Phek only) at ₹1395 per person per permit. Minimum group of four applicants usually required. Allow two working days.

STATE OFFICES Indian nationals can get state-specific inner line permits at the following state offices but, except for Sikkim, foreigners shouldn't expect any permit help whatsoever.

Arunachal Pradesh (☎223341243; Arunachal Bhawan, Block CE 109, Sector 1, Salt Lake City)

Manipur (Map p446; ☎24758163; Manipur Bhawan, 26 Rowland Rd)

Mizoram (Map p458; ☎24617887; Mizoram Bhawan, 24 Old Ballygunge Rd) Take the lane beside 23 Ashutosh Chowdhury Rd.

Nagaland (Map p446; ☎22825247; Nagaland House, 11 Shakespeare Sarani)

Sikkim (Map p446; ☎22817905; Sikkim House, 4/1 Middleton St; ☎10.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-2pm Sat) Permits free and usually issued within 24 hours.

Photography

Electro Photo-Lab (Map p450; ☎22498743; 14 Sudder St; ☎10am-9pm Mon-Sat, noon-7pm Sun) Instant passport photos, film-developing, digi-prints and camera-to-CD/DVD burning.

Telephone

If you're a foreigner, getting a SIM card can be awkward in most of Kolkata but around Sudder St, numerous stalls will sell you a Vodafone SIM (₹155 including ₹49 credit) if you provide one passport photograph and a passport/visa photocopy.

Tourist Information

Cal Calling (₹45) Useful monthly info-booklet sold at Oxford Bookstore.

CityInfo (www.explocity.com) Advertisement-led listings pamphlet available free from better hotels.

India Tourism (Map p446; ☎22825813; 4 Shakespeare Sarani; ☎10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Free maps of greater Kolkata.

West Bengal Tourism (Map p452; ☎22437260, westbengal tourism.gov.in; 3/2 BBD Bagh; ☎10.30am-1.30pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat) Comfortable, recently redecorated office mostly set up to sell tours (last sales 4.30pm). They also have booths at the airport, both domestic terminal (☎8am-9pm) and international terminal (☎11am-6.30pm Mon-Sat).

Dangers & Annoyances

Kolkata feels remarkably unthreatening. Predictable beggar-hassle around the Sudder St traveller ghetto is a minor irritant. Crossing the road is a more of a day-to-day worry: the mad traffic takes no prisoners. *Bandhs* (strikes) occur with monotonous regularity, closing shops and stopping all land transport (including taxis to the airport). Monsoon-season flooding is highly inconvenient but rickshaw-wallahs somehow manage to ferry passengers through knee-deep, waterlogged streets.

i Getting There & Away

Comprehensive and largely accurate air- and train-timetables appear in the Graphiti supplement of the *Telegraph* newspaper each Sunday.

Air

Long-haul destinations from **Netaji Subhash Bose International Airport** (NSBIA; www.nsbai.airport.org) include Frankfurt on Lufthansa and London on **Air India** (Map p452; ☎22114433; 39 Chittaranjan Ave; ☉10am-6.30pm Mon-Sat). Alternatively connect via Dubai, Singapore, Bangkok or Dhaka. For Chinese destinations use **China Eastern Airlines** (Map p446; ☎40448887; InterGlobe, 1st fl, Landmark Bldg, 228A AJC Bose Rd) flights to/via Kunming, Yunnan. **Druk Air** (Map p446; ☎22902429; 3rd fl, 51 Tivoli Court, 1A Ballygunge Circular Rd) flies to Paro, Bhutan but you'll need to make tour arrangements. The Bhutanese consulate is in the same building.

Most carriers sell tickets online but for Bangladeshi airlines it can prove useful to visit an agency or go directly to the airline office:

Biman (Map p446; ☎22266672; www.biman-airlines.com; 6th fl, 99A Park St)

GMG (Map p450; ☎30283030; www.gmgairlines.com; 20H Park St)

United Airways Bangladesh (Map p450; ☎9007095363; www.uabdl.com; Ripon St)

Boat

Sporadic ferries to Port Blair (Andaman Islands) depart from **Kidderpore Docks** (Karl Marx Sarani), entered from Gate 3 opposite Kidderpore commuter train station. Tickets (₹1700 to ₹7640) go on sale 10 days before departure at the **Shipping Corporation of India** (Map p452; ☎22484921; Hare St; ☉10am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri).

Bus

INTERNATIONAL

BANGLADESH Several Marquis St agencies run Bangladesh-bound services involving a change of vehicle at the Benapol border. **Shohag Paribahan** (Map p450; ☎22520757; 21A Marquis St; ☉5am-10.30pm) runs 10 daily bus services to Dhaka (₹720/520 with/without AC, 13 hours). **GreenLine** (Map p450; ☎22520571; 12B Marquis St; ☉4am-10.30pm) serves Dhaka (₹750, 13 hours, 5.30am and 7am), Chittagong (₹1150, 22 hours, 1pm) and Sylhet (₹1150, 18 hours, 5.30am).

BHUTAN A Bhutan Government postbus to Phuentsholing (₹350, 22 hours, 7pm Tue, Thu, Sat) departs from a side yard of Esplanade bus station (Map p452), where there's a special **ticket booth** (☉9.30am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat).

DOMESTIC

The city's biggest bus station is **Esplanade** (Map p452) with many city buses, state-wide CSBC services and routes towards Sikkim. For buses

towards Odisha (Orissa) use **Babughat** (Map p442) near Eden Gardens.

FROM ESPLANADE For Darjeeling or Sikkim, start with one of many night buses to Siliguri (₹325 to ₹700, 12 hours), departing between 6pm and 8pm. For Malda, CSTC buses leave at 7am, 8.30am, 9.30am, 10.45am and 8.15pm (₹143, 9 hours) and can be prebooked up to two weeks ahead.

FROM BABUGHAT Buses line up in front of Eden Gardens commuter train station offering numerous overnight services to Ranchi (from ₹170, 10 hours) and to Puri (₹370, 12 hours) via Bhubaneswar (₹320, 9½ hours). **Dolphin** (www.odishabusservice.com) charges only ₹50 extra for sleeper buses. Most buses leave around 8.30pm but arrive by 5pm if you have baggage.

Train

INTERNATIONAL For Dhaka, Bangladesh, the **Maitree Express** (II/CC/1AC ₹348/522/869, 12½ hours) departs Kolkata (Chitpore) Station at 7.10am Saturday and Wednesday, returning from Dhaka Cantt at 8.30am Tuesday and Sunday. You must have Darsana marked on your Bangladesh visa. Buy tickets up to 10 days ahead at a **special desk** (☉10am-5pm Mon-Thu, 10am-3pm Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) within **Eastern Railways' Foreign Tourist Bureau** (Map p452; ☎22224206; 6 Fairlie Pl). No return tickets are available.

DOMESTIC Before buying your tickets, check 'train between stations' on indianrail.gov.in to see if there's a Foreign Tourist quota left (using the 'Enter Quota' line). If so, head for the **Eastern Railways' Foreign Tourist Bureau** (Map p452; ☎22224206; 6 Fairlie Pl; ☉10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) with a book to read – waits can be long but there are sofa-seats. **Computerised booking offices** (Map p452; Koil-aghast St; ☉8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) offer tickets on the wider train network but have no tourist quota. Sudder St travel agencies can save you the trek and can sometimes manage to find tickets on 'full' trains but check what their commission will be before booking.



CAR & MOTORBIKE HIRE

Car rental companies including **Wenz** (☎9330018001; http://wenzcars.com) and **Ruia** (www.ruiaacarrentals.com) can organise long-distance chauffeured rides. Sudder St agencies might be able to find you better deals: reliable **Backpackers** (Map p450; ☎9836177140; www.tourdesun darbars.com; Tottee Lane) can help and also has three 125cc motorcycles for hire (per day/month ₹500/10,000).

DOMESTIC & REGIONAL FLIGHTS FROM KOLKATA

DESTINATION	AIRLINES (& NO OF FLIGHTS PER WEEK IF LESS THAN DAILY)	DURATION	FARES FROM
Agartala	SG, AI, IT, I7, 6E, 9W	55min	₹1930
Ahmedabad	SG, 6E	2½hr	₹3430
Aizawl	AI, IT	1½hr	₹2630
Bangkok (Thailand)	IT, IX, 9W, TG		₹8055
Bagdogra (Siliguri)	IT, SG, 9W, AI (4)	55min	₹1930
Bengaluru (Bangalore)	6E, IT, SG, AI, S2, 9W	2hr	₹3430
Bhubaneswar	IT, 9W	55min	₹3315
Chennai	9W, 6E, SG, AI, I7	2hr	₹3030
Chittagong (Bangladesh)	Z5 (3), 4H (Tue, Thu)	1hr	₹5000
Delhi	6E, 9W, AI, SG, IT, S2	2hr	₹3030
Dhaka (Bangladesh)	BG, IT, 9W, IX (4), Z5, 4H (3)	1hr	₹3520
Dibrugarh	6E, AI (5)	1½hr	₹2360
Dimapur	AI	1-2hr	₹2210
Gaya	AI (Fri)	50mins	₹1400
Goa	IT via Mumbai, SG via Delhi	4½hr	₹3710
Guwahati	SG, 9W, S2, 6E, AI, IT	1¼hr	₹1930
Hyderabad	IT, 6E, AI, SG	2hr	₹3030
Imphal	AI, IT, 6E, S2 (4)	1¼hr	₹2430
Jaipur	6E, SG	2½hr	₹3030
Jorhat	9W (3), S2 (2), AI via Shillong (3)	2¾hr	₹2080
Kathmandu (Nepal)	AI (4)	1¼hr	₹6030
Lucknow	9W 6E via Patna	1½hr 2½	₹6330 ₹2285
Mumbai	9W, 6E, IT, AI, SG, S2	2½hr	₹3735
Nagpur	6E	1¾hr	₹2185
Patna	9W, IT, 6E	1hr	₹2030
Port Blair	AI, S2	2hr	₹7830
Raipur	IT	2hr	₹3830
Ranchi	IT, 9W	1¼hr	₹2730
Shillong	AI (6)	1¾hr	₹2120
Silchar	AI, IT	1½hr	₹2200
Singapore	IX/AI	4½hr	₹7520
Tezpur	AI (3)	2hr	₹2120
Varanasi (via Delhi)	SG	8hr	₹2315
Visakhapatnam (Vizag)	9W	2¼hr	₹6100
Yangon (Rangoon, Myanmar)	AI (Mon)	2hr	₹9080
Yangon (via Gaya)	AI (Fri)	4hr	₹9080

6E=IndiGo, 9W=Jet Airways, AI=Air India, I7=Paramount, IT=Kingfisher, IX=Air India Express, KB=Druk Air, S2=JetLite, SG=SpiceJet, TG=Thai Airways, 4H=United Airways Bangladesh, Z5=GMG, BG=Biman

Check whether your long-distance train departs from Howrah (Haora; HWH), Sealdah (SDAH) or 'Kolkata' (Chitpore; KOAA) Station.

i Getting Around

Tickets on most city transport routes cost from ₹4 to ₹8. Men shouldn't sit in assigned 'Ladies' seats'.

To/From the Airport

NSBIA Airport is 5km east of Dum Dum, itself 20 minutes by metro (₹6) from central Kolkata. With massive construction works underway to expand and modernise the airport, you can expect changes to come. Vehicle access is currently from Gate 1, 900m southwest of the terminals where a shopping and hotel complex is under construction. Or from Gate 2 on Jessore Rd, around 400m northwest of the terminals. Note that the airport's left-luggage service has closed.

SUBURBAN TRAIN Biman Bandar is the airport train station, raised on concrete piles and a three-minute stroll from the International terminal. Trains run just a few times daily and not on Sundays. There are departures to Sealdah at 10.45pm, to Majerhat via BBD Bagh Commuter Station at 7.40am and 1.54pm, and to Majerhat via Ballygunge at 10.40am and 6.45pm. These, plus a 6.30am train, stop at Dum Dum Junction where you can switch onto the metro. Don't mistakenly alight at Dum Dum Cantt.

TAXI Prepaid, fixed-price taxis from the airport to Dum Dum metro/Sudder St/Howrah cost ₹140/240/240. Pay before leaving the terminal then cross over to the rank of yellow cabs, ignoring touts in between. After 10pm very few fixed-rate taxis are available and others will charge far more.

AC BUS New air-conditioned airport buses (₹40, around one hour) run every half hour from the terminal area to Esplanade Bus Station (Map p452). There are also less-frequent services to Tollygunge (via the bypass) and to Howrah.

BUS-METRO COMBINATION Cheaper (₹12), more frequent and often faster than the airport bus but a bad idea with much luggage. Passing by on Jessore Rd, crowded buses 30B (bound eventually for Babughat) and DN9/1 take around 25 minutes to get to Dum Dum metro station. To find Jessore Rd, walk 400m northwest out of the international terminal keeping the Hindu temple and raised train line to your direct left. Cross a construction area and a busy access road and immediately beyond this, shimmy through a small gap in the walled airport compound; the gap is known as Airport Gate 2½ and is opposite Shiva & Sons Airtel shop.

CITY BUS Minibus 151 to BBD Bagh and relatively infrequent bus 46 to Esplanade (₹7, one hour) via VIP Rd start from Airport Gate 1, 900m from the domestic terminal.

Bus & Tram

Passenger-crammed mechanical sweat boxes hurtle along at frightening speeds wherever the chronic traffic congestion abates. Most buses' route-numbers are written in Western script even when destination signboards aren't. Photogenically battered old trams are slower but follow more predictable routes. Pay aboard.

Ferry

The fastest and most agreeable way from central Kolkata to Howrah train station is generally by **river ferry** (₹4; ☉8am-8pm) departing every 15 minutes from various jetties including Bagbazar, Armenian (not Sundays), Fairlie, Bishe June and Babu Ghat. Reduced service on Sundays.

Metro

Kolkata's busy one-line **metro** (www.mtp.indianrailways.gov.in; ₹4-8; ☉7am-9.45pm Mon-Sat, 2-9.45pm Sun) has trains every six to 15 minutes. Extensions are being built to Dakshineswar and to the airport, while a second line (Howrah-Sealdah-Salt Lake) is planned eventually. For Sudder St use Esplanade or Park St. There's a cursory baggage check on entering. Theoretically you may not carry bags over 10kg (nor may you carry ghee, leaves or dead bodies for that matter).

Rickshaw

Kolkata is the last bastion of human-powered 'tana rickshaws', especially around New Market. During monsoon, high-wheeled rickshaws are the transport most able to cope in 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 so tips are heartily appreciated.

Autorickshaws squeeze aboard five passengers to operate as share-taxi along fixed routes.

Suburban Trains

Useful trains run roughly hourly between Sealdah-Dum Dum-Dakshineswar and in rush hour only from Kidderpore-BBD Bagh-Bagbazar-Chitpore-Dum Dum. For timetables see <http://erail.in/kolkatasuburbantrains.htm>.

Taxi

Kolkata's ubiquitous yellow Ambassador cabs charge a minimum fare of ₹22 for up to 1.9km. Ensure that the meter's on (usually easier when flagging down a passing cab than if approaching a parked one) but be aware that what it shows is NOT what you'll pay. To calculate short-trip fares, double the meter reading and add two rupees. For longer trips, that system will be a couple of rupees under, so consult the driver's conversion chart or ask for a fare print-out. Fares rise after 10pm.

MAJOR TRAINS FROM KOLKATA

Departures daily unless otherwise stated.

USEFUL FOR	TRAIN	DURATION (HR)	DEPARTURES	FARES (SLEEPER/3AC/2AC UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED)
Bhubaneswar	12839 <i>Chennai Mail</i>	6¾	11.45pm (HWH)	₹167/468/675
Chennai	12841 <i>Coromandal</i>	26½	2.50pm (HWH)	₹461/1242/1700
	12839 <i>Chennai Mail</i>	28	11.45pm (HWH)	₹461/1242/1700
Delhi	12303/12381 <i>Poorva</i>	23	8.05am/ 8.20am (HWH)	₹426/1143/1561
	12313 <i>SDAH Rajdhani</i>	17	4.50pm (SDAH)	2AC/1AC ₹2030/3395
Gorakhpur	15047/15049/15051	17¾-19	2.30pm/9.40am/ 8.10am (KOAA)	₹311/845/1160
Guwahati	12345 <i>Saraighat</i>	17¾	3.50pm (HWH)	₹359/954/1302
	15657 <i>Kanchenjunga</i>	22	6.35am (SDAH)	₹332/902/1240
Hooghly	Bandel Local	1	every half-hour (HWH)	Unreserved ₹9
Lucknow	13151 <i>Tawi Exp</i>	23	11.45am (KOAA)	₹339/924/1272
	12327/12369	18¾	1.10pm (HWH)	₹363/966/1316
Mumbai CST	12810 <i>Mumbai Mail</i>	33¾	8.15pm (HWH)	₹508/1374/1883
New Jalpaiguri	12377 <i>Padatik</i>	10	10.55pm (SDAH)	₹259/673/911
Patna	12351 <i>Danapur</i>	9½	8.35pm (HWH)	₹252/653/881
Puri	12837 <i>Howrah-Puri</i>	9	10.35pm (HWH)	₹244/631/852
	18409 <i>Sri Jagannath</i>	9½	7pm (HWH)	₹224/601/822
Siliguri Jctn	13149 <i>Kanchankaya</i>	11½	8.30pm (SDAH)	₹259/643/881
Varanasi	13005 <i>Amritsar Mail</i>	15	7.10pm (HWH)	₹269/776/1065

HWH=ex-Howrah, SDAH=ex-Sealdah, KOAA=ex-Chitpur

Beware that around 1pm, much of the city's one-way road system reverses direction! Not surprisingly many taxis are reluctant to make journeys around this time.

There are prepaid taxi booths at Howrah Station, Sealdah Station and at both airport terminals, but such taxis are infamously hard to find at night.

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