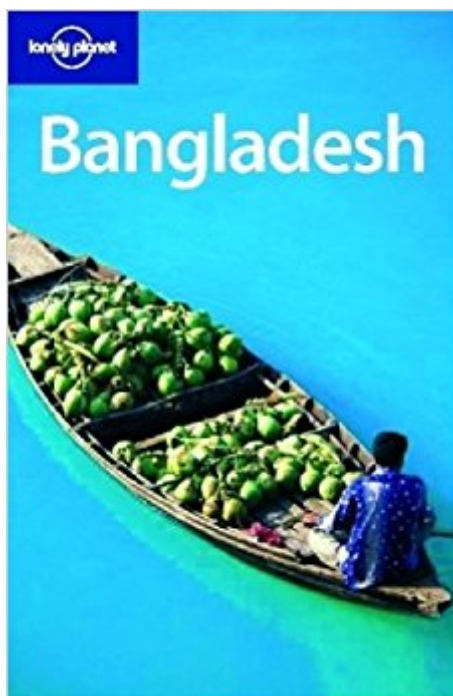


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Lonely Planet Bangladesh (Country Guide)



Synopsis

Be swept up in the maelstrom of Dhaka, explore the lush forests of the Sundarbans, relax into the serene rhythms of rural life along endless riverbanks and experience the extraordinary kindness of the people. Discover the secrets of one of travel's last frontiers with the only English-language guide to Bangladesh. Rest Easy. Opinionated, in-depth accommodation and eating reviews enable you to make the best choice, whatever your budget. Discover The Diversity of this dynamic country with our comprehensive listings of sights and attractions. Find Your Way with the help of detailed transport information and over 40 maps. Get The Background on Bangladesh's intriguing history and culture. Talk The Talk with our Bangla language chapter.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For sheer global reach and dogged research, attention must be paid to Lonely Planet. --Los Angeles Times, February 2, 2003

I've been traveling solo throughout the third-world for 25 years and nearly always carry a LP book. I've never used another other than LP because LP has always proven to be more than adequate. This one on Bangladesh is admittedly abit skimpy--but again--adequate. The maps for individual towns and cities are--as usual--excellant--as is the glossary and language section. Bangladesh is a confounding and complicated country to survive in let alone describe--a world of chaos and madness-- The Bangla script is impossible and God, throughout time, for some

reason, has cursed its people with every plague and catastrophe imaginable. It is a wonder they still survive--a testament to the human will to live no matter how dire the circumstances. For the experienced backpacker, the person who survives on wits and intuition--the only kind that should attempt Bangladesh-- this book will nicely suffice. It is short, concise and easy to pack. When scrambling amongst the hordes you will have no time to sit down and read an epistle of a guide book--you will not even have time to sit down. Read the epistles before you leave home. Take out LP when you finally hit the streets. For the rest--Bangladesh is a lot to bite off and chew--consider confining the majority of your travel to India--or simply read about it at home. DH Koester--"And There I Was" ~ And There I Was Volume IX: A Backpacking Adventure in India

This travel guide is possibly the worst one that Lonely Planet has ever produced. Apparently, the previous edition was a lot better, and since hotel and other such listings change more frequently than any publisher could keep up with anyway, it may be advisable to search out the earlier edition for its purported superior coverage of actual sites within the country. The main problem is not that huge portions of the guide are out of date (inevitable due to publishing deadlines and due to the quick pace of change in South Asia), but that they were never correct to begin with. Maps are wrong in every possible sense: topologically; geometrically (positionally and locationally as well as in terms of actual distances); inconsistent scale; incorrect orientation, etc. Also, major streets are unlabeled in many cases, but this is a somewhat moot point as there are hardly any street signs in Bangladesh, and as most streets do not form a grid pattern that is easily followed. For this reason, it would have been helpful to supply dual labeling in Bangla (several competitors do this for most of their maps). That would make it easier to question the locals, who rarely speak or read English. I also personally find LP maps in general to be too difficult to use except when under strong lighting with a magnifying glass, or in a hotel room. Usually we are using the map while walking, in a moving vehicle, under poor lighting. The cross-referencing scheme and miniscule typeface are of no help there! Rough Guide and Moon have the right approach to legible maps that can be used under adverse conditions (Footprints are OK and sometimes very good, but are rarely to scale). Everyone that I encountered in my one month in the country complained about this guide; not the least the locals, many of who were interviewed by the LP writer but ignored when the final edition was published. The only thing this guide has going for it is that it has accurate train connections (bus connections are a joke in the country and would be impossible to write up accurately; find a local and ask them where to go). Bus timings are also accurate; though some are now faster due to a few improved roads and some new bridges where ferries were once required. Descriptions and directions for most

of the major archaeological sites (which are on a par with the best that I have seen in Latin America and Southeast Asia, in spite of being relatively unknown), are not adequate and are in some cases quite wrong. But it is very cheap to hire a local guide for a day or more in each region (I mixed this approach with 100% independent travel, and it worked out quite well). Just don't depend on this guide as an aid for independent travel; think of it as an armchair companion to a semi-organised tour. As one example of a deliberate omission (as evidenced by an interview with local tours and hotels), the one and only hotel that is close to the Dhaka airport was not included, even though it has many flexible pricing options even for transit passengers (the airport itself has few if any facilities) and even provides a free airport shuttle. This omission unfortunately pushes one towards the expensive Gulshan district upon arrival, which is a bit far and also not near any major sites in the capital (my detailed reports will be submitted to Lonely Planet's forum later on, and don't really belong in a book review). That said, this was the best vacation of my life; mostly because the people of Bangladesh are the friendliest and most open I have ever encountered (and that is saying a lot). I felt like I was already home, everywhere I went. This is in fact a slogan of the country. It is a beautiful and lush country besides, even though mostly flat (except for the unbelievably gorgeous tea and pineapple plantations in the northeastern region of the country), but I think the guide could have done a better job of describing the culture and making a case for why one should visit the country. It is unfortunate that there are currently no other travel guides to Bangladesh. Competition seems to improve most guides, and this pertains to ALL of the publishers. Bradt used to publish a guide but never bothered to update theirs since the 1992 edition. I doubt there's much of a market though, as I only encountered a small handful of tourists during my entire month in the country. Even more reason to visit now, before it is "discovered".

"Lonely Planet's" guide to Bangladesh is pretty thin --less than 200 pages -- for a country with a population of 150 million. Well, there's a reason for that. Bangladesh is hardly a tourist paradise. Dhaka is probably the most crowded city in the world and, in fact, the biggest attraction of the city is the traffic -- which is horrendous. The numbers of rickshas is astonishing; they line up eight-across on some streets all jockeying for position with three-wheelers, cars, trucks, buses, hand-pulled carts, and the occasional herd of goats. Dhaka is worth visiting just for a ricksha ride and traffic jams that are simply unbelievable. The country is pretty outside Dhaka: emerald green rice paddies, palm trees, and innumerable little villages. The city of Cox's Bazaar is the honeymooner's capital of Bangladesh. The beach here is advertised as the longest and widest in the world. What interested me was the fact that of thousands of people on the beach only a few

boys were actually in bathing attire and in the water. Women may dip their toes in the surf but they don't dress for the occasion. The all-covering Shawar Camise with head-scarf is de rigueur as female beachware -- as it is for everyplace else. Despite a lack of major attractions, Bangladesh is not a bad place to visit and you won't encounter crowds of foreign tourists. Maybe you won't encounter any. "Lonely Planet" covers the country in good detail including history, culture, current politics, sidebars about interesting trivia, places to stay and eat, and books you might want to read. It's a good guide to a place that needs a guide. Smallchief

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