

DISCOVER BANGLADESH: THE BIGGEST DELTA ON THE PLANET

# Star HOLIDAY

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## Part - 2

# Swatch of no ground



The night fell and darkness engulfed us. I was spellbound by the wonderful silence of nightfall; serene, peaceful and tranquil. The silence was broken by the call for dinner. Sobhan bhai, the cook, had already fixed the table, or rather the pati, and laid scrumptious food on it. The menu was simple; rice, daal, two types of vegetables and fish curry. Due to my low intake of food it was very difficult to convince the cook that the food was absolutely delicious. Consequently I was nicknamed 'chorui pakhi' (sparrow). Yet mealtimes were always enjoyable, as Master Shaheb, the captain and senior most member of the boat would hypnotize us with his stories, ranging from outlaws invading his village home to unknown sea creatures jumping on deck, while Kalimullah bhai, the engineer cum sculptor, would try to counter with his smart logic and Jakir bhai, the all-rounder, doing everything from cutting onions to helping Master Shaheb maneuver the boat through the freezing nights, would sit at a distance and smile discreetly. It took me little time to feel at home on Loknath. I was very comfortable just lying on deck watching the night sky, or Kalimullah bhai carving a piece of wood into 3 small cute dolphins with a simple chisel.



The next two days the boat remained anchored among the mangroves due to bad weather in the Bay. This left me time to explore Kotka beach and the surrounding forest. I took a walk barefoot through the mangrove forest, carefully trying to avoid the pointed roots, which pierce the sticky mud. I spotted dozens of deer as they came to drink water from the small ponds, monkeys feeding in the tree branches, many different types of kingfishers, and other birds I've never seen before. Later in the day I walked down to the waterfront, where the sand and mud is covered with bits and pieces of burnt clay. These are said to be remains from the salt pots, used by salt-makers active in this area a hundred years ago. Excited, content and overloaded with impressions I returned to the boat. And as the weather forecast was favorable and we would be starting for the Swatch-of-No-Ground the next morning, I knew there was more to come.

The engine started at four in the morning. The trawler cruised along the tide like a pirate ship. It took me some time to learn the technique to synchronize with the swinging of the moving trawler by bending the knees the way the boat sways. But for someone like me who doesn't know how to swim it was rather risky to stand on the deck without anything to hold on to, yet my excitement to see the dolphins got me brave and of course I was not encouraged to meet them in their neighborhood! On our way we watched some sea turtles, lots of gulls, and huge school of small reddish-brown fish swimming underneath the water in a big circle like a magnificent sea carpet.



After about five hours of sailing, one of the crew members claimed to see something and we slowed down. The researchers were ready on the upper deck, equipped with their binoculars and cameras. All I could see was blue - different shades of blue. Rubai instructed the captain to head in the direction of the sighting; the trawler moved forward slowly. I fought to see what the others were seeing, first by naked eye, then through the binoculars. But I saw nothing. Suddenly I heard a 'swoosh'. Then this wonderful creature bobbed its head up and slowly took a dive, leaving its enormous fluke print on the water. A fin whale, dark, long and elegant the second largest animal on this planet. It was still quite far away and our trawler started to move towards it for a better view. I ran to get my camera and climbed up to the upper deck. Again a crew member called out and looking to my left, I was flabbergasted: Not one or two, but about a dozen bottlenose dolphins were riding alongside our boat. Their silver-gray backs glittered as they jump and splashed down on the water. There were about 15-20 animals in this group. While I found the whales to be slow and elegant, dolphins are more mischievous, spraying water through their nose and swimming here and there. Some were riding along the boat, while others seemed irritated by fish hanging on to their skin, jumping up from the water some three feet and splashing down. We moved on a little further south, where the water is a different blue, much darker, due to depth and salinity. I named it 'blue within the blue'. Again we encountered another group of bottlenose beauties, playfully circling our boat, swimming just beneath the surface close to the boat. And then, unexpected, a graceful mother whale with a calf at her side enters the arena. Pretty soon we were surrounded by dozens of dolphins and about 5 whales. I really don't have words to express those feelings. The search was ended for the day as Master Shaheb didn't like the south wind coming up. We returned towards land, witnessing the wonderful transformation of colors as the setting sun reflected its rays on the water and changed it from silver to pale blue and then to yellow, orange, pink, magenta, violet, dark blue and finally black.



My 4 days stay extended to 11 days and yet I felt I hadn't seen enough. But my cell phone started to buzz once we came into network range and home was calling. I headed back with a heart filled with thankfulness to the Almighty, to my friend for his generous invitation, to Rubai and Liz for allowing my laziness and being laid back, and to the crew for being sweet and hospitable. I did not bid a proper goodbye as I see this is not as the end: I will definitely go back.

And this time I will not leave unless I've spotted the Killer whale!

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For detail information contact *The Guide Tours Ltd.*

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## Whales in the Bay

In every ocean, sea, bay of the world, and in few rivers and lakes are found whales, dolphins and porpoises -- the cetaceans, a group of marine mammals. There are 78 species, some exceedingly rare and local. There are two types of cetaceans. The toothed form mainly consists of smaller whales and all types of dolphins and porpoises, while the toothless baleen whales have long plates of stiff hair like material -- whalebone or baleen hanging from each side to strain out the planktons on which they subsist. Baleen whales are bigger animals, among them the blue whale reaches 80 to 100 feet in length and 90 to 130 tons in weight. The team lead by Rubaiyat Mansur so far recorded two species of baleen whales -- the Fin whale and Bryde's whale.



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[Swatch of no ground- Part 1](#)

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