

Sent:
Wed 7/11/07 11:43 AM
To:
panddbrown@mchsi.com

Third day--Every day has felt like three. We have done so much each day that journaling in the evening fills pages. We have to be pulled away by our guide from every stop, as all of us ask questions.

We have had beautiful weather (well, it's hot but not unbearable). We had all read so many warnings about the bad weather, smog, traffic, and crowds, that we are all very pleasantly surprised and enjoying every minute of every day. Only one stop has had to be rescheduled because of the rain. As the alternative was shopping, no one complained!

So far in Dhaka, we have toured Star Mosque, Fort Lalbagh, Sadarghar waterfront, Curzon Hall, 3-leaders Masouleum, Language Martyr's Monument, a temple, Dhaka University campus, and more. Favorite moments over the past few days were taking photos on the waterfront, receiving a bindi (look that up) from a Hindu woman who walked up to me, and taking a great photo (my "National Geographic moment") of a woman behind a rickshaw. I have a story to tell of the bus meeting and passing another vehicle in a narrow alley in Old Dhaka. I have the pictures to prove how close we were. Wow! Any closer and we'd have scratches down the side of the vehicle. No kidding! Many of the buses here do have scratches.

One more favorite visit was to a geography classroom at the U of Dhaka campus today where we were able to visit personally with the students. Many of us exchanged emails with students and look forward to writing back and forth. We visited the Bangladesh Meteorology Department today where we met a man who actually created a computer model for predicting tsunamis. I was fascinated by that!

I'm still taking lots of pictures. Everyone is healthy. Anne who missed the plane has now arrived. We do need a bolt cutter for one who has lost a luggage key and two pieces of luggage have not yet arrived; but everyone is coping well with no complaints.

I will continue when I can.

Dawn

Sent:
Fri 7/13/07 3:19 PM
To:
panddbrown@mchsi.com

http://cs.gazetteonline.com/blogs/understanding_bangladesh/default.aspx

Hey, if you are interested, Rex Honey, a colleague is blogging daily and publishing online. I have a short bit in there one day under first impressions. You'll see pictures, too. Internet is so very cool!!!!

I had a late dinner last night with my dear friend Iqbal Quadir's brother Kamal! How cool is that--half-way around the world and I had a date! We dined in a very fine restaurant where I tasted the national fish, Hilsa; I never had a fish so tender! Then, I was treated to western food--ordered chicken breast--that was a very refreshing change to the Asian food we are eating daily. I found

out about Kamal's successful business venture (<https://www.cellbazaar.com/>), asked a few questions about Bangladesh culture (I actually had generated a list earlier in the day), and enjoyed my time with him immensely. Kamal has offered, too, to connect me to someone who is an expert in the GrameenPhone microlending process in order to get assistance with my curriculum writing project. Thanks, Kamal! Thanks, Iqbal, for introducing me to Kamal!

We have finally been to the countryside, seen the Ganges (the Padma), and walked through a village. After eating a boxed lunch, Dan walked around and collected the food we weren't going to eat for distribution to the people hanging around staring at us. The kids actually fought over the food when Dan passed it on to a woman.

It continues to amaze me how busy the people are. Imagine wall to wall shops built out of corrugated steel. Each shop keeper is managing his own shop--tailoring, shoe repair, rickshaw repair, grocery, etc. There are no big stores. I'll share pictures once I get home, of course. The river water uses are numerous--bathing, washing-up dishes, swimming, cleaning, harvesting, fishing, etc. Bridges vary from large concrete structures to narrow one-beam bamboo.

We shopped at New Market today, but with these short, one-hour shopping trips, we don't buy too much. We're repacking tonight and heading northwest for four days. I'll write again next week if I get time.

Until next week,
Dawn

Sent:
Sat 7/21/07 4:00 PM
To:
panddbrown@mchsi.com

It's the end of day thirteen and we're packing tonight for a trip to Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, and then Sylhet before returning to Dhaka. Please follow the group blog:

http://cs.gazetteonline.com/blogs/understanding_bangladesh/default.aspx

Our last night in Rajshahi (the 17th), we were treated to a traditional Hindu wedding meal, complete with an awful smelling drink of yogurt, cumin, and black pepper--I couldn't get myself to taste it, but some said it was delicious!

Well, today we traveled by bus and then boat to a pottery village near Savar and were surprised to hear it was day two of a 3-day Hindu wedding. We met the blushing bride and proud groom, heard some fun music by local musicians, and took a bunch of photos (of course!). What a bonus that was! Team member Dr. Bimal Paul explained the Hindu wedding customs. Do you know that the bride and groom are married on Day 1 at the bride's home in a ceremony and may sleep together on Day 1 but with a chaperone? Then, on Day 2 there is a second ceremony and celebration meal before the bride and groom set off for the groom's place; they do not sleep together that night because of an old Holy Book story about a groom not honoring the Goddess of Snake, so the snake bit him in the night and he died. Day 3 is a day of great celebration for the bride and groom--that is their honeymoon night. We took up a collection and surprised the bride and groom with a generous monetary gift. That should more than make up for crashing their party.

We went on to a metal craft place near Savar where Owner/Artist Sukanta Banik demonstrated the

lost wax technique of metal craft. The craft has been practiced there for over 200 years! Wow! The detailed work is spectacular—wax figures are made first, then clay is painted on in layers over the wax. The clay is heated and the wax is "lost". Then metal is poured into the clay mold. The clay mold is then broken to uncover a unique original piece of metal work. Of course we shopped here as well as the pottery village! Artists abound in this beautiful country, but they are hidden in the villages. I am so very glad our guides knew how to find them.

Having our fill of good Asian food (rice and more rice, mutton--it's been both sheep and goat, dal, veggies, and chicken with bones in it), we were delighted to have an Italian meal tonight at our hotel. We'll likely savor this meal for days.

I think all of us have enjoyed the personal contacts we have made with local Bangladeshi. We visited Dr. Bimal Paul's sister in her home yesterday. All her in-laws and neighbors gathered around to see "the foreigners". She lives in a neat corrugated steel home with a tidy yard and two buildings--one for sleeping, one for cooking/guest room attached. Her husband is a retired primary school principal. We crossed a lot off our wish list for photos with that stop yesterday--jack fruit trees, bananas growing on trees, colorful laundry hanging to dry, and inside photos of a village home.

One thing we enjoy doing is passing out inflatable globes to children wherever we go, even the University. We also have some books to distribute. This is very rewarding and we have photos of the smiles of recipients.

Jane is excited about her purchase of a harmonium, a keyboard instrument in a box, something like an accordion. Sarah is excited about her purchase of rickshaw art (me, too). Most of us have already filled our suitcases with purchases and wonder if we need to buy more suitcases before we go home. Who knew we would find so much to love and take with us?!

So, nearly halfway through our 28-day visit in Bangladesh, all is well. No one has been sick, and we have learned much. We continue to see erosion and flooded fields. We read of new flooding in the Chittagong area, but at this point it doesn't interfere with our plans. We talk about the lesson plans we'll be writing, and the Fulbright-Hays folks can be proud of the work we will be doing.

I don't know what Internet connections we will have until our return to Dhaka, so be patient for new postings both by email and in the blog. This is a beautiful place--we continue to love the people as we are the first foreigners some of them have ever met.

Have you heard one of the marketing campaigns here? Visit Bangladesh before the tourists come! Pete, we may have to return here together!

Love, Dawn

Sent:
Sun 7/29/07 3:54 PM
To:
panddbrown@mchsi.com

Hi, guys! I've been to Chittagong, then on to Cox's Bazar (pronounced Ba-jar locally) where I walked along the world's longest (more than 120 km) beach!!!! Now I'm up in Sylhet where we had police escort the last 45 km into town. Sirens and lights--the whole shabang! We have been treated like we are royalty (or presidential candidates?) coming to town. Now there are armed policemen on duty at the hotel, too. There are few tourists in the country of Bangladesh, so they

are taking very good care of the ones who are here. We are very safe and will sleep secure.

Right now the local electricity is out, a common occurrence throughout the country. However, an on-site generator keeps the Internet hooked up and lights and fans running. The A/C will go back on when the electricity comes back on.

We continue to learn more each day. In fact, on the bus trip today, Bimal gave two lectures: Infant Mortality Causes and Rates and Natural Hazards and Disease. The summary of each is that things are getting better--Infant mortality rates have gone down significantly (down to around 50 from 124 deaths per 1000 live births) and disease related to natural hazards have also decreased significantly. Very cool!!!!

I hope you are all able to read the blog. I know our access to Internet has been sporadic, but be patient.

We continue to stay pretty healthy. Right now a few people have colds or sinus infections. I am trying to avoid those individuals, am eating well, getting plenty of rest, etc.

With just about one week left in this wonderful adventure, I look forward to what is ahead--tea gardens, a bit of shopping, a visit to one more school (an English Medium School), a boat ride, and work days for curriculum.

Speaking of boat rides--we had a lengthy boat ride the other day on Rangamati Lake, complete with lunch on an island, a rainstorm, police escort, and waterfalls.

We see flooding everywhere now on a daily basis. The frequent (but not constant) rains are swelling the fields. People expect these annual rains and I continue to be amazed by their creativeness and contentment in coping. Flood waters are closing in on Dhaka, so we are watching with eager eyes what might happen to our plans to return to the states.

When I get home and organize my thoughts, I hope to tell you a lot of what I have learned...until later this week in Dhaka...

Chasing the monsoon (or is it chasing us?),

Dawn

Sent:
Sun 8/05/07 5:36 PM
To:
panddbrown@mchsi.com

I came to Bangladesh a month ago to study natural hazards and how people cope with them and leave tomorrow with pages and pages of notes on the things I have learned, my lesson plans begun, and memories and photos to last a lifetime.

My immersion into Bangladeshi culture gave me many new experiences--new foods (Bangladeshi, Thai, Indian, Chinese)(we did sneak in a couple of meals at Pizza Hut for a taste from home), new clothing (bought two 3-piece outfits of salwar, kameez, and orna), new vocabulary (pani=water; grameen=rural; and more--we each had to recite at least ten Bangla words with their translations

before Dr. Bimal Paul would approve our leaving the country!), history lessons, and geography lessons. I met many people as part of our scheduled program--university and college professors and officials; government officials; CARE officers; Red Crescent staff; and students and staff in primary, secondary, public, and private schools. I also met everyday folks--Dr. Bimal Paul's relatives; our tour guide personnel; hotel staff; and numerous people whose paths crossed with ours as we crossed the country. I especially enjoyed meeting and spending time with Kamal Quadir (brother of my dear friend Iqbal Quadir, founder of GrameenPhone), who is founder and CEO of cellbazaar.com; and Professor K. Muzammel Huq, former General Manager of Grameen Bank, whom I and a colleague interviewed today for specific material to be used in our lessons on the microlending process (Thanks, Kamal, for connecting the two of us!).

Our first-hand experiences and lessons in and with the flood-prone areas, flash flooding, river flooding, river erosion, and monsoon rains have provided rich backgrounds for our curriculum writing. We have discovered the many poor people of this overpopulated country are the ones suffering the most from the hazardous environmental conditions, especially right now with the serious flooding this season. Yet, despite this developing country's multitude problems--poor roads, poor drainage and waste disposal systems, and a need for strong administration (currently led by an interim government)--this relatively new country is filled with optimistic, welcoming people filled with hope. Government is making changes. And the economy is slowly growing, largely due to technological advances in this country, especially the introduction of the cell phone.

I have been proud and excited to see cell phone towers throughout the country--urban and rural--the fruition of my brilliant, visionary friend and Waldorf classmate, Iqbal Quadir. Our guides were able to use their cell phones in even the remotest locations. We were entertained by the current mobile phone service billboard wars and saw evidence of widespread mobile phone use--urban vegetable market traders were carrying baskets full of vegies on their heads with cell phones in their pockets; businessmen in rickshaws were on cell phones conducting business across the country; boatmen had original cell phone rings; and villagers in remote rural areas were busy with phone calls. It is with great pride in Iqbal that I also report a number of people have attributed improvements in communication through the use of mobile phones to better preparedness in times of flooding and to faster access to medical care year-round.

I have been blessed by my adventure in Bangladesh and will be talking about this for years (and sharing the pictures!). I will do my best to tell the story of Bangladesh, to encourage others to visit this country for themselves, and to pray for improved conditions for the people.

I must awake at 4 a.m. Dhaka time to catch the first in a series of planes back to Iowa, so this will be my last correspondence until I get back home. Feel free to use my home email address in your next correspondence--panddbrown@mchsi.com.

Love to all my friends!

Dawn