

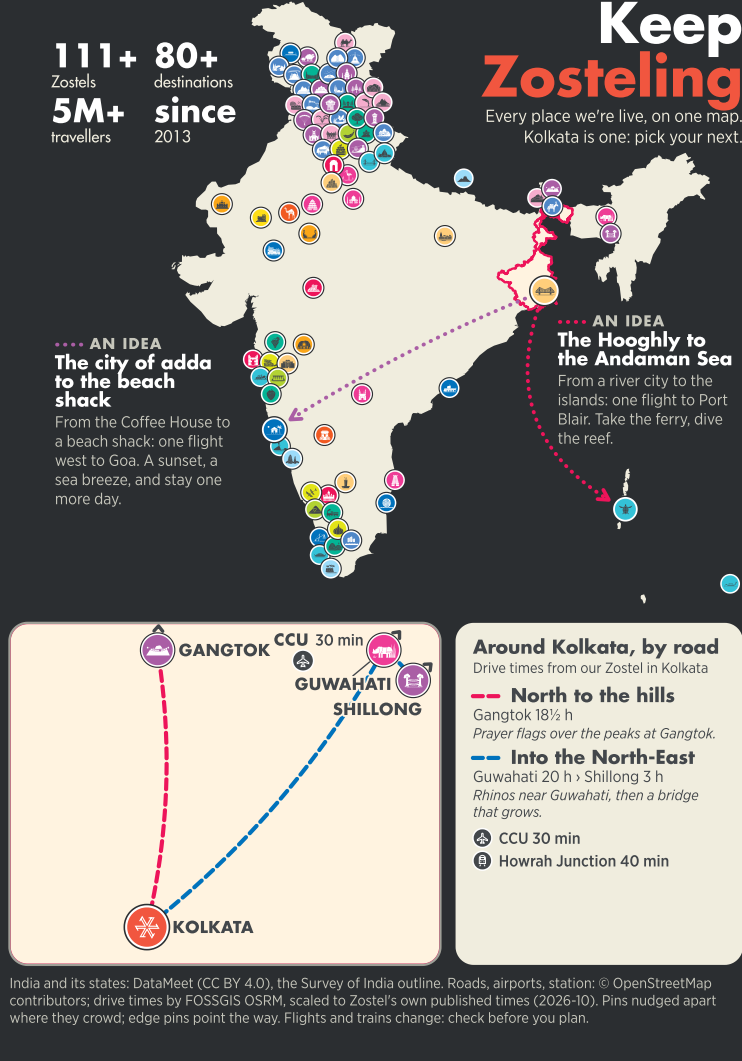
KOLKATA

a map made by Zostel
for young travellers
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ZOSTEL



Nomoshkar, Kolkata!

Nomoshkar! We're the Kolkata Zōbus, and our city began as three villages on the Hooghly, Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Kalikata, where Job Charnock set up the Company's post in 1690. It was British India's capital until 1911, and the home of the Bengal Renaissance: Rammohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Vivekananda, and Tagore, Asia's first Nobel laureate, in 1913. Cross the riveted Howrah Bridge at dawn above the flower market, ride a tram that has rattled since 1902, and argue over coffee on College Street. Eat a kathi roll, then a rosogolla, then one more. In autumn the whole city turns into a gallery for Durga Puja. Adda first, plans later.

Stay with us in Kolkata

One Zostel, in Salt Lake on the city's east side, by Tank No. 4.

Zostel Kolkata

A social backpacker base in Salt Lake: graffiti on the front, snooker, chess and karaoke in the common room, a workstation, a rooftop, dorms (one female-only) and private rooms. From Howrah, the East-West Metro to Karunamoyee or Central Park, then an auto.

Maps: © OpenStreetMap contributors (ODbL), data fetched 2026-10-13 (UTC). Terrain: Terrain Tiles on AWS (Mapzen/Tilezen), from SRTM courtesy of NASA and the U.S. Geological Survey. Walk lines routed by FOSSGIS OSRM on OpenStreetMap. Drawings: the Zostel brand's own. Things change: check the day's timings at the gate.

Practical tips

The metro

Five colour-coded lines. The Blue Line runs north to south under the old city, for Shyambazar, Girish Park, Esplanade, Park Street, Maidan, Rabindra Sadan and Kalighat. The Green Line runs from Howrah under the Hooghly to Esplanade, Sealdah and Salt Lake. Buy a token or a smart card at the counter or by app, and keep the token for the exit gate.

Trams, ferries, taxis

Two tram routes run from the Esplanade, to Shyambazar and to Gariahat, slowly. The state's ferries cross the Hooghly from the city's ghats to Howrah: buy a token at the ghat, Yellow Ambassador taxis still cruise: ask for the meter or agree the fare. Ride apps work everywhere: shared autos run fixed routes.

Heat, rain and the best months

October to February is the time to come, mild and clear. March to May is hot and humid, up to about 40°C: walk early and late, and drink water. The monsoon, June to September, brings heavy rain and water-logged streets: carry an umbrella, wear sandals that can get wet, and check the forecast.

Crowds and pockets

Howrah station, New Market, Burrabazar and the Puja pandals are packed: keep your bag in front and your phone in a pocket you can feel. At Howrah, ignore anyone who offers a taxi on the platform: use the prepaid taxi booth or an app cab. At New Market, porters will offer to guide you round: a smile and no.

Every number is a tip on the map overlay, in the colour of its kind: **City of Palaces** (red), **River and Maidan** (blue), **Phuckia to Mishti** (yellow), **Boi, Bangles, Bazaars** (green), **Adda and the Arts** (purple), **Tram, Taxi, Ferry** (grey). A drawing beside a line shows what you will find there:

Durga Puja, the crowded week

Pandals open from Mahalaya, and the four main days, Saptami to Dashami, bring the biggest crowds of the year, mostly at night. Go pandal-hopping in the afternoon or very late, on foot and by metro, and agree a meeting point with your friends. Roads close and cabs crawl. Book your bed early.

Temples, mosques, churches

Every faith's place in the city is open to visitors who come respectfully. Dress to cover shoulders and knees, take shoes off where asked (temples, the Jain temples, the mosques, Mother House), cover your head in the mosque and where asked, leave leather outside the Jain temples, and ask before you photograph anyone at prayer.

Ferries and ghats

The ferries are crowded at the office rush, so cross mid-morning or towards dusk, hold the rail and let people off first. The ghat steps are steep and slippery when wet. The river is busy and its current strong: watch from the steps, and leave the swimming to the locals who know it.

Dalhousie to the flower market

4.1 km - about 3 hours with stops • 8 stops

St John's graveyard and Charnock's tomb, the GPO on the first fort's ground, round the Lal Dighi past the Writers' Building, north through Burrabazar to the Armenian church, down to Mallick Ghat's marigolds, and over the Howrah Bridge on foot. Ferry or metro back.



The stops

- 7 St John's Church**
Find Job Charnock's octagonal mausoleum, the oldest in the city's graveyards
- 9 General Post Office (GPO)**
Find the brass plate on the east stairs marking the old Fort William's wall
- 1 BBD Bagh and the Lal Dighi**
Spot the statue of Benoy, Badal and Dinesh in front of the Writers' Building
- 2 Writers' Building (Mahakaran)**
Look up at Minerva, crowning the central pediment on the roofline
- 11 Armenian Church of the Holy Nazareth**
Find Rezaabebbeh Sookia's gravestone of 1630 in the churchyard
- 32 Mallick Ghat Flower Market**
Watch the garland makers thread marigolds faster than you can count
- 31 Howrah Bridge (Rabindra Setu)**
Look up where the two cantilever arms hold the suspended span over mid-river
- 30 Howrah station (Howrah Junction)**
Look back at the station's red-brick towers of 1905, then down to the metro

Closed days

Many museums close on Mondays (the Victoria Memorial, the Indian Museum), the Marble Palace on Mondays and Thursdays; New Market and many College Street stalls on Sundays. The Tiriteta Bazaar breakfast is over by mid-morning. Check each day's timings at the gate.

5 minutes of history

1690 Charnock lands at Sutanuti
Job Charnock of the East India Company comes back to Sutanuti on 24 August 1690 and sets up the Company's post on the Hooghly's east bank: the date the city long kept as its founding.

Three villages bought

The Company buys the rights to three villages, Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Kalikata, and starts the first Fort William. Kalkata gives the city its name.

A new fort, and the Maidan

After the battle of Plassey in 1757, Robert Clive begins a new Fort William; finished in 1781, it needs open ground round it, and that field becomes the Maidan.

1772 Capital of British India
Calcutta becomes the capital of British India, and stays so until 1911: the City of Palaces, second city of the British Empire after London.

1854 The first train from Howrah
On 15 August 1854 the first public train leaves Howrah: today India's largest and busiest station complex.

1873 The trams start
Horse-drawn trams run first in 1873; electric trams follow in 1902. Asia's oldest electric tramway still running.

1911 The capital moves to Delhi
The capital of British India moves from Calcutta to Delhi: the city stays Bengal's capital, and a capital of the arts.

1913 Tagore's Nobel
Rabindranath Tagore, born at Jorasanko in 1861, wins the Nobel Prize in Literature for Gitanjali: the first non-European to win it.

1943 The Howrah Bridge opens
The cantilever bridge of 26,500 tonnes of riveted steel replaces the old pontoon bridge; in 1965 it is renamed Rabindra Setu.

1955 Pather Panchali
Satyajit Ray's first film, made in and round the city, wins eleven international prizes.

1984 South Asia's first metro
On 24 October 1984 the metro opens under Chowringhee; in 2024 the Green Line becomes India's first metro under a river.

2021 Durga Puja on UNESCO's list
In December 2021, Durga Puja in Kolkata is inscribed on UNESCO's list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Talk like a local

Nomoshkar
Hello, with folded hands
no-mosh-ka

Dada / Didi
Elder brother / sister: what you call any driver or shopkeeper
da-da / dee-dee

Adda
Long, free-wheeling talk with friends, over tea
adda

Mishti
Sweet; the sweets themselves
mish-tee

Bhaat
The clay cup your tea comes in (matir bhaat)
bhaat

Cha
Tea
chaa

Jhol

A thin curry, most often of fish

Pujo

The Pujas; above all, Durga Puja

Para

Your neighbourhood, and its Puja and its club

Boi

Book; Boi Para is College Street

Khubb bhalo

Very good

Dhonnobad

Thank you

dhon-no-baad



Got a day to spare?

15 Ramzan: Zakaria Street.
Evenings of kebabs, haleem and sweets outside the Nakoda Masjid.

24 December: plum cake.
Plum cakes from Nahoum's in New Market, and Park Street lit up for Christmas.

19 Summer: sherbet and daab.
Tender coconut, daab, straight from the cart, or as sherbet at Paramount.

Festivals worth timing a trip for

33 Durga Puja (September or October). Pandals by the thousand, the dhak, the dhunuchi dance, UNESCO-listed since 2021. Kumartuli's potters start months before.

54 Kali Puja and Diwali (October or November). The new moon night of Kartik: lamps, fireworks and queues at Kalighat and Dakshineswar.

Jagaddhatr Puja (October or November). Chandannagar's own Puja, lit so famously its light-makers now light Kolkata's pandals too.

42 Christmas (December). Lights over the whole of Park Street, a late service at St Paul's, plum cake from New Market.

49 Boi Mela (late January to February). The world's largest non-trade book fair, near our door.

Pola Baisakh (mid-April). The Bengali new year: new clothes, sweets, and shops opening new account books.

15 Eid. Prayers spill out of the Nakoda Masjid into the streets; Zakaria Street feasts through Ramzan. About eleven days earlier each year.

Adda and the arts

18 Adda. Long talk over tea or coffee, about everything: the city's favourite art.

44 Nandan. The film centre Satyajit Ray opened in 1985; the city's film festival's home.

44 Academy of Fine Arts. Bengal's painters, from the Bengal School on.

44 Rabindra Sadan. The city's stage for theatre, dance and music.

53 Tollygunge. The studios that named Tollywood: Ray, Ghatak and Sen worked here.

17 Presidency University. Ray's college, on College Street, among Bengal's oldest.

Bengal's crafts, and where to meet them

Kantha. Running stitch on layers of old saris: flowers, birds, fish, whole stories.

20 Shankha and pola. White conch-shell and red bangles, worn together; Bowbazar's shops.

Terracotta and dokra.

Fired clay and lost-wax brass, from Bengal's villages to Kumartuli's shops.

The Bankura horse. A long-necked terracotta horse from Bankura, long the emblem of the All India Handicrafts Board.

Baluchari. Silk saris from Bishnupur whose borders tell the epics: GI-tagged.

Markets by what they sell

24 New Market (Hogg Market). Leather, clothes, cheese, chocolate and Nahoum's cakes in a market of 1874. Closed on Sundays.

17 College Street. Books new, old and rare, about a kilometre and a half of them.

32 Mallick Ghat. Marigold, rose and tuberose by the mountain, before dawn under the bridge.

12 Burrabazar. Wholesale spices, textiles and hardware in the lanes by the bridge.

20 Bowbazar. Gold jewellery, and shankha and pola bangles.

23 Free School Street. Second-hand books, old vinyl and vintage finds.

36 Hatibagan. Silk and cotton fabric and festival wear, North Kolkata's way.

Eat like you're from Kolkata

Kolkata has never met a cuisine it didn't want to sit down with, and a thread of mustard oil runs through it all. Bengal's own kitchen first: fish in mustard, kosh mangsho, telebhaja, and sweets of chhena and jaggery. Then the Nawab's cooks and their biryani with a potato, the Chinese breakfast of Tiriteta Bazaar, the kathi roll of 1932, the cabins' Mughlai paratha and Park Street's grills. Phuckka and jhalmurai on every corner, chai in a clay bhaat. The old counters first, then the dishes to hunt down.

22 Nizam's. Kebabs off the skewer and into a paratha since 1932; bamboo skewers since 1964. First on our guide's list.

4 K.C. Das. Spongy rosogolla in light syrup, and rasmalai, which K.C. Das is credited with inventing.

Girish Chandra Dey and Nakur Chandra Nandy. Sandesh of fresh chhena, plain, flavoured or, in winter, with nolen gur. No branches.

"Nolen gur season? Then you queue. Everyone queues."

40 Balaram Mullick and Radharaman Mullick. Winter's nolen gur sweets, and mishti doi set in a clay pot, from a family shop of 1885.

Anadi Cabin. Flaky paratha stuffed with egg and minced meat, cut in squares, with a thin potato curry.

Aminia (or Arsalan). A light, fragrant biryani with a potato and often an egg, then firm.

Bhojohori Manna. Mutton slow-cooked dark with onion and spice, with luchi; build a Bengal meal round it.

Indian Coffee House. Coffee, a cutlet and an argument that lasts all afternoon, upstairs since 1942.

Tiriteta Bazaar's breakfast. Steamed buns, momos and fish-ball soup off the pavement at first light.

Paramount. Tender coconut sherbet, from syrups the family still makes, since 1918.

Mughlai paratha. Paratha stuffed with egg and spiced minced meat, fried and cut into squares.

Telebhaja. Fritters fried in mustard oil at the corner shop: beguni (aubergine), aloo chop, peyaj, eaten hot with puffed rice on a rainy evening.

Dishes to hunt down

41 Flurys. Breakfast and pastries in a pink and white tea room of 1927.

Phuckka. Kolkata's pani puri: crisp shells filled with spiced mashed potato and dipped in tamarind water, sharper and sourer than its cousin; eaten one by one off the vendor's leaf.

Jhalmurai. Puffed rice tossed in a paper cone with mustard oil, chanchanur, onion, chilli and spices, made in front of you.

Kathi roll. Skewered kebab rolled in a paratha, often with a layer of egg; born at Nizam's in 1932.

Kolkata biryani. A light, fragrant biryani with a potato and often an egg, traced to the cooks of Wajid Ali Shah, exiled here in 1856.

Kosha mangsho. Mutton cooked slowly in its spices till the gravy turns dark and clings; with luchi.

Mughlai paratha. Paratha stuffed with egg and spiced minced meat, fried and cut into squares.

Telebhaja. Fritters fried in mustard oil at the corner shop: beguni (aubergine), aloo chop, peyaj, eaten hot with puffed rice on a rainy evening.

16 The Chinese breakfast. Pork buns, momos, fish-ball soup and sausages at first light in the old Chinatown.

Ilsh (in the monsoon). Hilsa, the river fish Bengal waits for each monsoon, steamed or in mustard gravy, shorshe ilsh, mind the fine bones.

4 Rosogolla. White, spongy chhena balls in light syrup; Bander Rasogolla has had its GI tag since 2017.

Sandesh. Fresh chhena pressed with sugar or jaggery into moulds: shells, fish, flowers.

40 Mishti doi. Sweet curd set overnight in a clay pot, with sugar or jaggery: the clay makes it.

40 Nolen gur (winter). The new date-palm jaggery of the cold months, in sandesh, rosogolla and mishti doi; gone by spring.

Chai in a bhaat. Tea in an unglazed clay cup, sipped on the pavement and thrown away: the city's adda runs on it.

Kolkata eats by the season

Winter: nolen gur. The new date-palm jaggery goes into sandesh, rosogolla and mishti doi from about November.

Monsoon: ilsh. Hilsa season, when the fish run up the rivers to spawn: shorshe ilsh, and every family's argument over the recipe.

Good to know

South Asia's first metro. Kolkata's metro opened on 24 October 1984, the first in South Asia: a 3.4 km stretch under Chowringhee. It now has five colour-coded lines.

A train under the Hooghly. Since March 2024 the Green Line runs under the Hooghly, India's first metro tunnel beneath a river. Howrah's metro station, 33 m down, is the deepest in India.

Trams since 1873. Horse-drawn trams first ran in 1873 and electric ones in 1902. Kolkata still runs India's only tram network, now two routes from the Esplanade.

No nuts, no bolts. The Howrah Bridge, opened in 1943, is held together by rivets alone: 26,500 tonnes of steel, most of it high-tensile steel from Tata Steel, and not a nut or bolt in it.

Pujo on UNESCO's list. In December 2021, Durga Puja in Kolkata was inscribed on UNESCO's list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Pandals open to visitors from Mahalaya.

A book fair for readers. The International Kolkata Book Fair, started in 1976, is the world's largest non-trade book fair and its most attended. Since 2018 it has its own ground in Salt Lake.

Asia's first Nobel. Rabindranath Tagore, born at Jorasanko in 1861, won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, the first non-European to do so. The Howrah Bridge was renamed Rabindra Setu after him in 1965.

Ray's first film. Satyajit Ray's first film, Pather Panchali (1955), won eleven international prizes. In 1992 he received an Honorary Academy Award. He opened Nandan, the city's film centre, in 1985.

One tree, a whole wood. The Great Banyan in Shibpur's Botanic Garden is at least 250 years old. Its main trunk was removed in 1925, but its 3,772 aerial roots now cover about 1.89 hectares.

Ilsh weather. Each monsoon, as the rivers swell, hilsa leave the Bay of Bengal and swim up the rivers to spawn, and Bengal's kitchens wait for them: shorshe ilsh, in mustard, is the dish.

The winter jaggery. Nolen gur, the new date-palm jaggery of the cold months, goes into sandesh, rosogolla and mishti doi each winter, and is gone by spring.

Two Chinatowns. Chinese families settled round Tiriteta Bazaar from the late 18th century; more moved east to Tangra's tanneries. Indian Chinese cooking, chilli chicken and all, grew up here.

Before the English. Armenian traders were on the Hooghly before 1690; in the churchyard of the Holy Nazareth, Rezaabebbeh Sookia's grave of 1630 is the oldest Christian grave in Kolkata.

Keepers of the synagogues. Kolkata's Baghaddi Jews are fewer than two dozen now. Their synagogues, Beth El of 1856 and Maghen David of 1884, are looked after by Muslim caretaker families, generation after generation.

The Bengal Renaissance. From Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar to Bankim Chandra, Vivekananda and Tagore, the 19th century's reformers and writers made Calcutta the centre of the Bengal Renaissance.

The Ambassador's home. The Ambassador, the Morris Oxford's Indian cousin, was built at Uttarpara, just up the Hooghly, from 1958 until 2014: Kolkata's yellow taxi.

Rosogolla's tag. On 14 November 2017 the GI Registry gave West Bengal its geographical indication for Banglar Rasogolla, the Bengal rosogolla.

Born on a skewer. Nizam's, behind New Market since 1932, claims the kathi roll, kebabs rolled in a paratha. In 1964 it swapped heavy iron skewers for bamboo ones.

Cricket since 1864. Eden Gardens has hosted cricket since 1864: India's oldest stadium and the world's third-largest cricket ground. The Calcutta Cricket Club has played on the Maidan since 1792.

Paras and adda. Kolkata is a city of paras, closed neighbourhoods, each with its club and its Puja, and of adda: long, free conversation, the city's favourite pastime.

College Street to Kumartuli

4.9 km • about 4 hours
College Street's book stalls, the Coffee House upstairs, the Marble Palace, Tagore's house at Jorasanko, Sovabazar Rajbari's courtyard of 1757 and Kumartuli's potters' lanes, then a ferry from the ghat. Weekdays: stalls shut on Sundays; Marble Palace shuts Mondays and Thursdays.

17 18 14 13 35

33

QUESTS

Dares for the brave and the curious. The map marks each with a star; tick them off as you go.

- 31** Walk across the **Howrah Bridge at dawn**. Start from the Burrabazar end as the flower market wakes below, and count the riveted joints you pass: there isn't a nut or a bolt in the bridge.
- 32** Find the biggest heap of **marigolds at Mallick Ghat**. Come before the sun is high, ask a seller what a garland is for, and photograph the heap, not the person, unless they say yes.
- 26** Ride a tram from the **Espanade to Shyambazar**. Two routes still run; take the northern one through the old city, sit by the window, and get off for College Street on the way back.
- 10** Cross the **Hooghly by ferry at dusk**. Buy a token at the ghat, stand at the rail and watch the Howrah Bridge go dark against the sky.
- 18** Start an **adda at the Coffee House**. Order a coffee and a kabiraji cutlet, share a table, and ask the next table what they're arguing about. Stay an hour at least.

- 57** Spot the temple, church and mosque in **one building**. Belur Math's main temple was built to look like all three at once. Find each in its gate, windows and dome.
- 55** Find where the **Great Banyan's trunk once stood**. The main trunk was removed in 1925; a small monument marks its place in the middle of a tree that is now a wood.
- 22** Eat a **kathi roll where it was born**. Nizam's has rolled kebabs in parathas since 1932. Order with egg, and eat it on Hogg Street, standing.
- 16** Eat a **Chinatown pork bun before the sun's high**. The breakfast market on the pavement is open by mid-morning. Come early, point at what you want, then find the Sea to temple.
- 28** Catch a **match day at Eden Gardens**. Buy from the official sellers, go early and join the noise: the ground has seen cricket since 1864.
- 33** Watch a **straw frame become a day figure**. In Kumartuli's workshops, straw is bound onto bamboo, then layered with river clay. Ask first, then watch one stage, quietly.

- 17** Find a **Bengali book you can't read, and buy it**. Tell a College Street stall-keeper what you're after (a Tagore, a Ray, a picture book) and let them find it.

- 13** Find the room where **Tagore died**. He was born in this house in 1861 and died upstairs in 1941. The museum marks the room; read a line of Gitanjali in the courtyard.

- 11** Find **Kolkata's oldest Christian grave**. Reza Beebeeh Sookia's grave in the Armenian churchyard is dated 1630: sixty years before Charnock's landing.

REACHING US

- Salt Lake, by Tank No. 4**
Zostel Kolkata. A social backpacker base in Salt Lake: graffiti on the front, snooker, chess and karaoke in the common room, a workstation, a rooftop, dorms (one female-only) and private rooms. From Howrah, the East-West Metro to Karunamoyee or Central Park, then an auto.

CITY OF PALACES

- 1 Tank Square, then Dalhousie, now BBD**
BBD Bagh and the Lal Dighi. The Company's town grew round this tank. Tank Square, then Dalhousie Square, now BBD Bagh, after three freedom fighters of 1930. Round it: the red Writers' Building, St Andrew's steeple, the Currency Building and the GPO's dome. Sundays are calm.
- 2 Built for the Company's clerks, 1777**
Writers' Building (Mahakaran). Thomas Lyon built it in 1777 for the East India Company's junior clerks, the writers: a red front about 150 m long. The state's secretariat for most years since 1947, so it's an office, not a museum: admire it from the square.

- 3 A red-brick synagogue with a clock tower**
Maghen David Synagogue. Built in 1884: red brick, a Renaissance front and a clock tower. Calcutta's Baghdadi Jews number fewer than two dozen now; Muslim caretaker families have looked after it for generations. Beth El, of 1856, is round the corner.
- 6 Doric columns and the city's own archive**
Town Hall (and its museum). Built in 1813 in the Doric style, where colonial Calcutta met. Now a museum of the city's history, and a library of rare books and journals on Kolkata from P. T. Nair's collection. Check the opening at the gate.

- 7 Charnock's tomb and Zoffany's Last Supper**
St John's Church. Calcutta's cathedral from 1787 to 1847, modelled on St Martin-in-the-Fields and paid for by a lottery. Zoffany's Last Supper inside, in the graveyard. Job Charnock's octagonal tomb and Begum Johnson's, who outlived four husbands.

- 8 India's oldest high court, after a Belgian hall**
Calcutta High Court. India's oldest high court, founded in 1862; its Gothic building, finished in 1872, copies the Cloth Hall of Ypres in Belgium. A working court on weekdays: see the front from Espanade Row West, beside the Town Hall's columns.

- 9 A white dome where the old fort stood**
General Post Office (GPO). Opened in 1868 on the ground of the first Fort William; a brass plate on the east stairs marks its old wall. The dome rises over 67 m on Ionic and Corinthian columns. A postal museum next door, a cafe inside. Post yourself a card.

- 11 A grave of 1630, before the English came**
Armenian Church of the Holy Nazareth. First built in 1688, rebuilt in 1724: possibly the city's oldest church, in a walled yard off Armenian Street. Burrabazar. Armenians traded here before the English came in 1690. Reza Beebeeh Sookia's grave of 1630 is Kolkata's oldest Christian grave.

- 14 Ninety kinds of marble and a private zoo**
Marble Palace. Raja Rajendra Mullick's mansion of 1835: sculptures, chandeliers, clocks and paintings on some ninety kinds of marble, and one of India's first zoos in the garden. The family still lives here: free, guided, no photographs. Closed on Mondays and Thursdays.

- 15 Akbar's tomb in red, over Zakaria Street**
Nakhoda Masjid. Kolkata's principal mosque, 1926: red sandstone, its gate after Akbar's tomb at Sikandra; Nakhoda means mariner, for the shipowners who came. In Ramzan, Zakaria Street outside turns into a night market of kebabs and haleem. Visit outside prayer times.

- 25 Asia's oldest museum, mummy included**
Indian Museum. Founded in 1814, with Nathaniel Wallich its first curator: India's oldest and largest museum. Fossils, coins, Mughal paintings, a mummy, and the Bharhut stupa's carved gateway. Give it half a day; closed on Mondays.

- 27 A 48 m column with a crown**
Shaheed Minar (the Ochterlony Monument). A fluted column of 1828, about 48 m tall, on an Egyptian base under a Turkish cupola; later renamed Shaheed Minar, the martyrs' monument. The Esplanade's landmark: buses at its foot, the metro beneath, the trams nearby.

- 31 No nuts, no bolts, all rivets**
Howrah Bridge (Rabindra Setu). Opened in 1943, renamed after Tagore in 1955: 26,500 tonnes of steel, all rivets, no nuts or bolts, about 705 m long. Some 150,000 people walk it every day. Cross it early on foot; photograph it from a ferry or the ghats.

- 37 Mirrors, mosaic and Belgian glass, 1867**
Parash Nath Jain Temples (Sheetal-nathi). The Viceroys' jeweller, Rai Sadras, built the Sheetalnathi temple in 1867: mirrors, Belgian glass, mosaic and chandeliers, one of four Jain temples round a garden with a pond, together called Parashnath. Shoes off, and no leather inside.

- 47 A white porch under the cable bridge**
Prinsep Ghat. A white Palladian porch of 1841, in memory of James Prinsep, who first read Ashoka's Brahmi script, under Vidyasagar Setu. At dusk the riverside walk fills with families and couples, and the bridge's cables light up overhead.

- 52 South Kolkata's lake, rowers and morning walkers**
Rabindra Sarobar (Dhakuria Lake). Dug by the Improvement Trust. South Kolkata's lake and park: morning walkers, rowers from the old clubs, winter's migratory birds, and a small Japanese Buddhist temple by the water. Come early.

- 55 One tree that became a forest**
Botanic Garden and the Great Banyan (Shibpur). A Company garden of 1787 on the Howrah bank. The Great Banyan is over 250 years old; its trunk went in 1925, but 3,772 aerial roots now make one tree a wood. Come by ferry or over Vidyasagar Setu. Closed on Mondays.

PHUCHKA TO MISHTI

- 4 The rosogolla family's shop, in a tin**
K.C. Das, Esplanade. Nabin Chandra Das made the rosogolla famous in the 1860s; his son K.C. Das is credited with rasmalai and put rosogolla in a tin to travel. Order two warm ones in syrup, a rasmalai, and a tin to take home.

- 20 Gold, and the shankha-pola bangles**
Bowbazar, the jewellers' street. The jewellers' street: gold, shop after shop, along B. Ganguly Street, and the street for shankha and pola, the white conch-shell and red bangles married Bengali women wear together. Bow Barracks is round the corner.

- 23 Old records and second-hand paperbacks**
Free School Street (Mirza Ghalib Street). Officially Mirza Ghalib Street. With Sudder Street, the backpackers' quarter for decades: second-hand book and record shops stocked by generations of travellers. Dig for vinyl; say no to street touts.

- 24 Red brick, a clock tower, and Nahoum's**
New Market (Hogg Market). Opened in 1874, named Hogg Market in 1903: red brick, a clock tower and over 2,000 stalls of leather, clothes, cheese and chocolate. Inside, Nahoum's, a Jewish bakery since 1902. Wave off the porter-guides; bargain. Closed on Sundays.

- 32 Marigolds by the mountain, before dawn**
Mallick Ghat Flower Market. Our guide calls it Asia's biggest flower market: under the Howrah Bridge, mountains of marigold, rose and tuberose, threaded into garlands for temples and weddings. Flowers come by boat and truck before dawn: go early, ask before you photograph.

Kolkata

Every number is a tip around the map, in its colour. Every star is a quest.



- 38 Mother Teresa's house, and her tomb**
Mother House (Missionaries of Charity). The house of the Missionaries of Charity, the order named for James Hickey, who printed India's first newspaper, in Calcutta, in 1780, and the office crowd's lunch street: stew and toast, cutlets, fish curry and rice, chowmein. Busiest at lunch; quiet on Sundays.

- 39 Obelisks and pyramids from 1767**
South Park Street Cemetery. Opened in 1767, in use until the 1830s: one of the oldest non-church cemeteries in the world. Obelisks, pyramids and domed tombs under old trees. Sir William Jones lies here, and Henry Derozio of Young Bengal. Quiet, shady, still a cemetery.

- 43 Built as a cathedral, Indo-Gothic, 1847**
St Paul's Cathedral. Laid down in 1839, consecrated in 1847; built as a cathedral, and probably Kolkata's biggest church, Indo-Gothic. Its spire rebuilt after the earthquakes of 1897 and 1934. Look for Burne-Jones's west window. Packed on Christmas Eve.

- 45 White marble that catches the last light**
Victoria Memorial. Curzon's idea after Victoria died in 1901: Emerson's white Makrana marble, 1906-21, in 26 hectares of gardens, with a museum of the Raj and of Bengal inside. Walk the gardens at dusk. Closed on Mondays.

- 48 The cable bridge that lights up at night**
Vidyasagar Setu (the second bridge). The second Hooghly bridge, 1952, named after the reformer Vidyasagar: cable-stayed, 823 m, a 457 m main span, cables fanning from two pylons. A road, not a walk: see it lit up from Prinsep Ghat at dusk, or from a ferry.

- 54 The temple that may have named the city**
Kalighat Kali Temple. On the Adi Ganga, the river's old course: the temple of 1809 may have given Kolkata, and so Kolkata, its name. A Shakti Peetha, packed with offerings and at Kali Puja. Shoes off; agree any weekend first or join the queue.

- 56 Nine spires on the river, Ramakrishna's temple**
Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Rani Rashmoni's temple of 1855: nine spires for Kali, twelve Shiva shrines along the river, and the rooms where Ramakrishna lived and taught. Go early, for marigolds and conch shells. Shoes off; long weekend queues. Then the ferry to Belur Math.

- 57 A temple that looks like**
Belur Math. Vivekananda set up the Math here in 1898. The temple of 1938 reads as a temple, a church and a mosque at once. Quiet riverside grounds; the evening arati's hymns. Ferry across to Dakshineswar.

- 59 Across the Hooghly with the office crowd**
The Hooghly ferries (Fairlie Ghat and the ghats). Across the Hooghly at dusk with the Howrah Bridge in silhouette. Ferries cross from Fairlie Ghat, Babughat, Armenian Ghat or Ahintola to Howrah. Buy a token at the ghat; skip rush hour, when boats are packed.

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- 5 The office crowd's lunch lane**
Dacres Lane (James Hickey Sarani). A lane behind the Esplanade, named for James Hickey, who printed India's first newspaper, in Calcutta, in 1780, and the office crowd's lunch street: stew and toast, cutlets, fish curry and rice, chowmein. Busiest at lunch; quiet on Sundays.

- 16 Pork buns and fish balls at first light**
Tiretta Bazaar (Tiretta Bazaar), the Chinese breakfast. The first Chinatown, named after an Italian, Edoardo Tiretta, settled by Chinese families from the late 1700s. At first light Sun Yat Sen Street sells pork buns, momos, fish-ball soup and sausages, gone by mid-morning. Come very early.

- 18 Adda under the high ceiling since 1942**
Indian Coffee House, College Street. The Coffee Board opened it in 1942, up the stairs of the Albert Hall of 1876 off College Street: the city's great room for adda. Turbaned waiters bring coffee and kabiraji cutlets under Tagore's portrait.

- 19 Sherbet by the college pool since 1918**
Paramount, College Square. A marble-topped sherbet shop on College Square by the Goldighi pool, opened in 1918 by a freedom fighter, its back room said to have hidden revolutionaries. Order the daab sherbet, made with tender coconut, on a hot afternoon after the books.

- 21 Biriyani with a potato in it**
Aminia, New Market. Kolkata biryani is light on spice, with a potato and often an egg: said to come from the kitchen of Wajid Ali Shah, exiled here in 1856. Aminia or Arsalan. Mutton biryani, a chaap, then firni.

- 22 Where the kathi roll began, 1932**
Nizam's, Behind New Market since 1932, Nizam's claims the kathi roll: skewered kebabs rolled in a paratha for office workers on the move. First on our guide's must-try list. Order mutton or chicken, with egg, and eat it standing.

- 40 Nolen gur, winter's sweetest word, since 1885**
Baralram Mullick and Radharaman Mullick. A showpiece sweet shop of 1885, now across the city, and the place for winter's nolen gur sweets, made with the new date-palm jaggery. Try the nolen guer sandesh, and mishti doi set in a clay pot.

- 41 A Swiss tea room on Park Street, 1927**
Flury's, Park Street. Two Swiss partners, Joseph Flury and Cinzio Trinca, opened this tea room in 1927, and it's still Park Street's breakfast: eggs, cakes and pastries, a pot of tea, in a pink and white room. Come early on a winter morning.

- 42 Chelo kebabs and Christmas lights**
Park Street, the old restaurants. The old dining strip: Momomo, unchanged since 1956; Peter Cat for chelo kebab, buttered rice under kebabs and a fried egg; Trinca's, where the bands once played. In December, Christmas lights cover it. Put your name down and wait.

- 51 Kosha mangsho, cooked slow and dark**
Bhojohori Manna, Ekdalia. A Bengali restaurant named after the cook in a Manna Day song: come for kosha mangsho, mutton slow-cooked till dark, with luchi or rice. Build a meal round it: shukto, dal, fish in mustard, mishti doi.

- 53 The neighbourhood that named Tollywood**
Tollygunge, home of Tollywood. Bengali films have been shot in Tollygunge's studios since the 1930s; the neighbourhood gave Tollywood its name. Ray, Ghatak and Sen worked here. The studios are closed to visitors: watch a Bengali film instead.

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- 36 North Kolkata's market and its old theatres**
Hatibagan. North Kolkata's busiest shopping street, round the Hatibagan crossing: saris, silk and cotton by the metre and festival wear, and pavement stalls before the Puja. The old Star Theatre, now the Binodini, still stands.

- 50 South Kolkata's saris, from the pavement up**
Gariahat. South Kolkata's shopping crossing: saris, silk and cotton by the metre and festival wear, and pavement stalls before the Puja. The old Star Theatre, now the Binodini, still stands.

ADDA AND THE ARTS

- 13 Where Tagore was born, and died**
Jorasanko Thakurbari (Tagore's house). The Tagores' red mansion: Rabindranath was born here in 1861 and died here in 1941. Now a museum of his manuscripts, paintings and rooms, and of the family's Bengal Renaissance. No photographs inside; check the closed day at the gate.

- 26 Asia's oldest working trams, two routes left**
Espanade tram terminus (and Smaranika, the tram museum). Horse trams from 1873, electric since 1902: India's only working network. Two routes run, both from the Esplanade, north to Shyambazar and south to Gariahat, about one car every half-hour: ask at the depot.

- 33 The potters' lanes where the Puja starts**
Kumartuli (Kumartuli), the potters' quarter. The potters' quarter on the Hooghly, where the Puja's figures are made months ahead: straw on bamboo frames, then layers of river clay, then paint. Walk the lanes of Banamali Sarker Street. Workshops are workplaces: ask before photographing.

- 35 A Durga Puja since 1757**
Sovabazar Rajbari. Raja Nabakrishna Deb's palace: a pillared courtyard where the family's Durga Puja has run since 1757. The old family Puja, boned-bair puja, are the festival's quiet side: lamps and the dhak in a courtyard. Come at Puja, and ask first.

- 44 Films, plays and paintings on one corner**
Nandan, Rabindra Sadan and the Academy of Fine Arts. Three cultural houses by St Paul's: Nandan, the film centre. Sanyal Ray opened in 1965, home of the city's film festival. Rabindra Sadan's stage: the Academy of Fine Arts' Bengal painters. Catch a film or a play, then tea on the steps.

- 49 The world's biggest book fair for readers**
Central Park, Salt Lake (the Bol Mela ground). Salt Lake's park and lake, near our door, is the Bol Mela's ground each winter. Since 1976 the world's biggest non-trade book fair: hundreds of stalls, a quiet covey, crowds. Late January to early February.

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