

VIVADA- Very Interesting Venture Amazingly Desirable Afloat

By Vrinda Beriwal

Incredible! Outstanding! Unbelievable!

Being born and brought up in Kolkata, Vivada made me fall in love with my city and state all over again! Never had I thought that such luxury river cruise was sailing in our Ganges.

Official State holiday for 3 days called for a short vacation. But where to go? Darjeeling the favourite holiday spot for all Kolkatans was so politically disturbed... then where? Hey! A luxurious river-cruise sails to the Sunderbans for 3 nights and 4 days. Hmm... interesting but will it be worth the money? You know how it is in West Bengal, shouldn't expect anything out of it. But reviews seem to be great. Why not try it! Alright departing on 23rd January from Millennium Park dock and returning on 26th. All packed and ready to depart at 8 a.m. but seeing Vivada turned me off. Oh it just read luxurious but did not look so. Let's go inside, the trip is paid for. I was shown to my executive room on the 1st floor and that set my pulse racing. Wow! Just across the bed were huge windows overlooking Ganges. The itinerary in the room looked promising. Then I set out to discover what was in store for next three days. Breakfast was laid out in the dining room. An extensive variety was on offer. I went to eat on the deck adjacent the dining room. Looking at the infinite Ganges, with colonial buildings on both sides and feasting on a wonderful meal was a pleasurable experience.

The day was left entirely on us to enjoy and interact. I booked myself for a massage treatment. The massage relaxed me to every extent. Then after the massage I was asked to step in the 'sauna' cubicle then in 'steam.' All of these were done with Ganges flowing right in front of my eyes. I even took a warm shower in the massage room.

"It was like whatever you do, Ganges was there flowing peacefully beside you."

Whole day just went by relaxing, interacting and eating. At night a folk dance show was organised for all of us onboard. It was beautiful and made me feel nearer to my own culture. It was arranged on the 'sky deck'. Under the stars watching folk dance, eating tasty snacks prepared by the chef and enjoying the cool breeze from Ganges, I couldn't have asked for anything more on a vacation. Then our cruise entered the dense Sunderbans. All the lights were switched off and I could hear the chirping of the forest birds. I went to the front deck where through the flash light, the captain was finding the best spot to anchor the cruise for the night. Occasional flash light gave the opportunity to see the famous mangroves on both sides of the river. It was an enthralling sight.

Next day in the morning at 6 a.m. we were served tea and biscuit and in a streamer we were taken for a walk along the mangroves. The path took us deep into the swampy mangrove forest for about 500 metres. The roots of mangroves poke out like thorns to breathe. Wrecked boats were also on the way and from behind the trees was the rising sun. Then we were taken to a crocodile farm and shown croc feeding.

We returned to our cruise and had a hearty breakfast. Then after a shower I decided to curl up on the day bed in my room overlooking Ganges as I didn't want to go the deck and get sun burnt. After a while we were again taken on the streamer to see an old temple and a watch tower. I was tired of going and coming. So after lunch I went to the deck to enjoy the mangroves from the open library. At 4 p.m. we again boarded the streamer for a long lazy river ride while tea and snacks were served on board. Though tired, the sight of mangroves so near to me was exciting to watch. We even saw a crocodile swimming near the coast and fresh pug marks of the famous Sunderban tigers in addition to a beautiful sun-set. The ride was worth going. On returning, in the evening there was another folk dance show on the sky deck, which was also very interesting and entertaining. I had my dinner which was laid out beautifully. The staff amazed me. From 6 in the morning to 11 at night, they served all 70 people on board with a smile and no complaints. Each and every staff member excels in their duty of keeping the customer happy.

In the morning at 6 we were taken to have a look at a Sunderban village. Small mud and hay huts, people busy in their morning routine was a scene to cherish. Coming from a city, it was my first experience to get a sneak-peek into the rural lives of West Bengal.

After the village sight seeing we were taken for a canopy walk. I was amazed at the infrastructure there. A path was made 10 feet above the ground, covered with net for safety, with mangrove dense forest on both sides. It was an unbelievable experience.

Once on cruise the day was at our disposal.

All the cruise passengers decided to organize a Tambola session. We spent the afternoon together enjoying and playing.

Lunch was served and I went to enjoy the day with the Ganges and Sunderbans all by myself. Being a nature lover and an ardent photographer, I found the day extremely pleasing with loads of opportunities to get great photographs. Day passed by and I still couldn't get enough of the most striking scenery I had laid my eyes on.

The evening was the best part of all. A barbecue dinner was organized on the sky deck, under the stars. We saw a short film on Sunderban tigers and had a blast after that. Dancing to loud music on open deck while floating on the Ganges, under clear starry night is an experience beyond expression...

Every one on board from children to pensioners danced all night forgetting any apprehensions they may have had. By the end of the evening we had become a huge family dancing and enjoying together. We celebrated 55th Anniversary of a couple on board. The stars and river did magic on everyone. Next day we were to return back to Kolkata at 11 a.m. but none of us wanted to go.

The last day when the cruise anchored in Kolkata, I felt like I was leaving my own family and home behind.

Overall an extraordinary experience, a must go for all nature lovers.